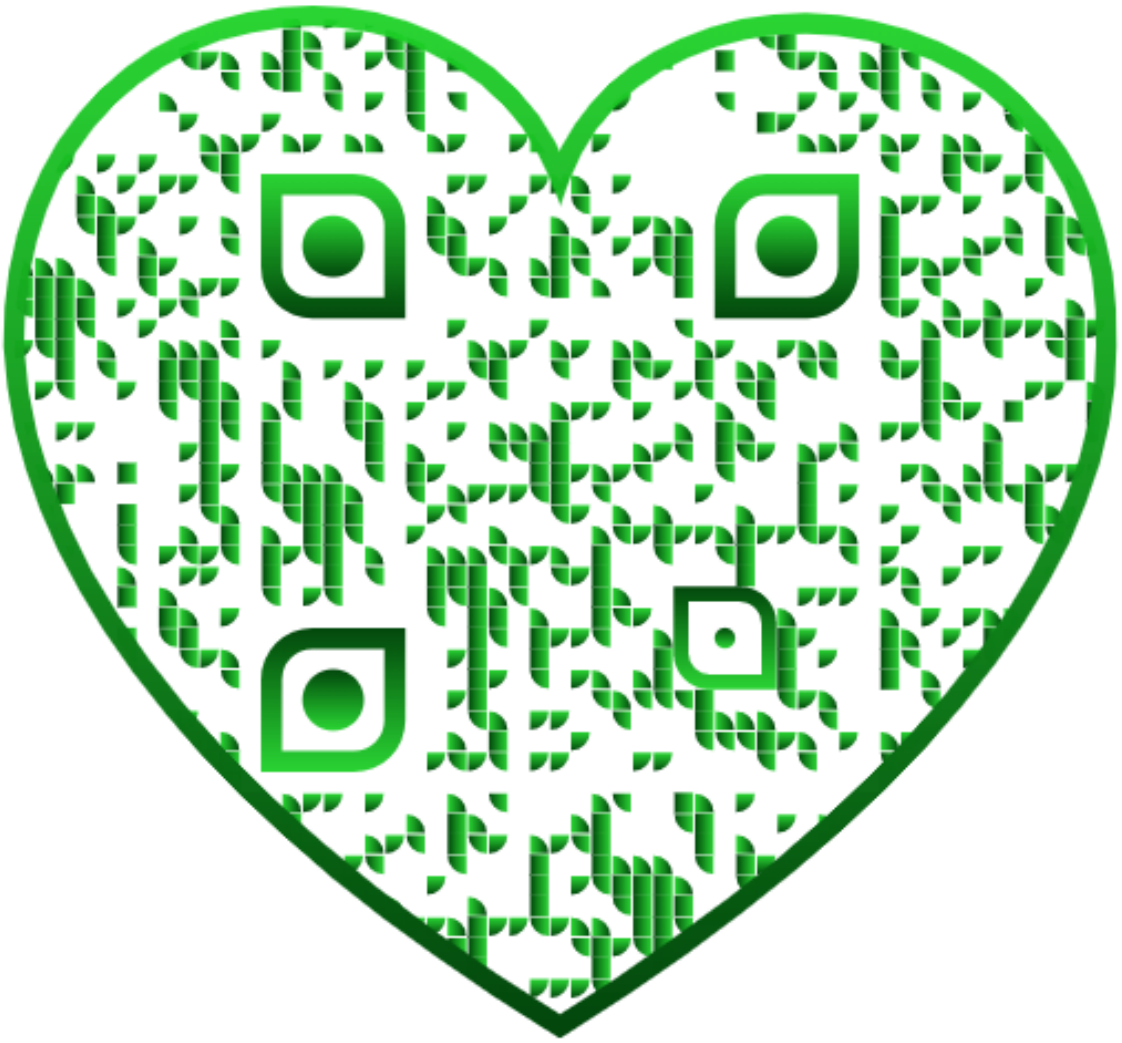
UFOs BEFORE ROSWELL:
EUROPEAN FOO-FIGHTERS
1940-1945

GRAEME RENDALL
FOREWORD BY SEAN CAHILL



UFOs BEFORE ROSWELL:
Foo-Fighters In Europe, 1940-1945

Graeme Rendall

Also by the author:

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Baptiste Friscourt helped with background on French authors who had written about the “Foo Fighters” and put me in touch with certain European researchers. Jose A. Galán offered insight into a Spanish case, providing background on what occurred. Confirmation of some of the official reports was obtained from John Greenewald’s theblackvault.com website. Gordon Permann, retired Helicopter Rescue Crewman with the US Navy, volunteer at the San Diego Air & Space Museum and a friend from the old 1990s rec.aviation.military Usenet newsgroup, allowed me to use items from his amazing collection of wartime *Luftwaffe* photographs.

Various people were instrumental in helping me to find my voice within the UAP community. The first was M. J. Banias at *The Debrief*, who asked me to pen a “Foo Fighters” article in April 2021. This opened doors for me in a way that I could never have previously envisaged. Part of this resulted from Christopher Mellon, former Deputy Assistant Director of Defense for Intelligence in the Obama and Bush administrations, endorsing the article with his comments on Twitter. Positive comments from not only Chris, but across #ufotwitter and beyond, demonstrated that there was a requirement for a book of this nature, spurring me on to greater efforts. Luis Jimenez at the *Unidentified Celebrity Review* YouTube channel took

a huge chance in interviewing a complete unknown on seeing Chris Mellon's endorsement, which pushed those doors open even wider. This increased exposure has allowed me to forge contacts throughout the UFO/UAP community.

My friends and colleagues at UAP Media UK have provided inspiration and support, therefore my thanks go to Andy McGrillen (host of *That UFO Podcast*), Dave Partridge (creator and editor of the fantastic *Shadows of Your Mind* magazine), Dan Zetterstrom (aka "The Zignal", responsible for incredible UAP-related artwork), Adam Goldsack (one of the first post-2017 UAP activists), Chris Sharp (our comms guru) and Vinnie Adams (*Disclosure Team*, who has a wealth of UAP knowledge). Andrew Hall (*Dead Hand Radio*) was also supportive from the get-go. The wonderful folks that inhabit #ufotwitter, who unfortunately are too many in number to list here, provided numerous points to ponder and more than a few laughs along the way. I am grateful for the friendships made and am so fortunate to have learned from so many brilliant minds along the way!

The former Director of the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP), Luis Elizondo, took time out from his incredibly busy and no doubt exhausting schedule to provide me with his thoughts regarding possible correlations between current and historical cases. I am immensely grateful to Lue for doing this.

Digging into the official archives located in Britain was much easier than I initially thought, due to The National Archives' online file ordering system that was in operation during the Covid pandemic. Other records needed for my research proved more difficult to obtain, although these were eventually located via the United States Air Force Historic Research Agency's huge collection of documents held at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. My all-too frequent requests for details held by AFHRA were handled quickly and efficiently by Tammy Horton and Maranda Gilmore. It was actually cheaper and quicker to obtain selected RAF Bomber Command documents from AFHRA than it was from The National Archives here in the UK!

The cover of this book was a truly multi-national effort. Dan Zetterstrom in Wales and Olof Röckner in Sweden began designing the artwork before I was even aware of what they were doing. I was completely blown away by the amount of research, work and sheer attention to detail that went into the final image that you see on the cover. If you do decide to write a review of this book, please do not forget to include comments about their artwork!

I am indebted to Sean Cahill for writing the Foreword to this book. Many of you will have seen and heard Sean via his frequent television news and podcast appearances since appearing in Episode 3 of *Unidentified: Inside America's UFO Investigation*. Bringing a certain gravitas to proceedings, he continued in the same vein when speaking truth to power on news shows covering the UAP issue. I learned that when Sean speaks, people listen. It was therefore both surprising and inspiring to discover that he had a personal connection to the "Foo Fighter" subject through his father, Staff Sergeant Thomas F. Cahill, United States Army Air Force. We should never forget that at the heart of the stories contained in this book, there were those who volunteered to risk their lives for their country and their families. Covid regulations permitting, I hope to meet Sean in person one day to move our friendship beyond the virtual world.

In writing this book, I hope that I have helped to add a small piece in the overall UFO/UAP puzzle, the issue which excites and frustrates us in equal measure. However, whilst I have been extremely fortunate to be helped in this endeavour by those listed above, any errors in the text are mine alone.

Finally, and on a personal note, my wife Jo, who understands my all-consuming passion for writing projects, has been incredibly supportive of my efforts throughout the time I have spent on this book. She has even started to ask me questions about the wider UAP issue. However, I get the feeling that she is also hoping to have her husband back now, at least until I start planning my next major book project sometime in the near future!

Graeme Rendall

Northumberland, England
August 2021

Foreword

Sean C. Cahill, Chief Master-at-Arms, United States Navy, (Retired)

When I sat down to read the first draft of my friend Graeme Rendall's seminal treatise on the "Foo Fighter Mystery" of World War 2, I thought that I might read a gentle summary with a dignified and well thought out opinion that erred on the side of caution. What I found instead was a poet speaking from within the mind of a world-class detective. With a gift for prose that tantalizes, teases, shocks and weaves, Graeme guides you through a herculean amount of detail. Where others passed up what they saw as unrelated minutiae, Graeme has found the right brush stroke that paints a picture of fear, terror, gas-lighting, guesses and for some, God.

For me personally, this book represents a retro-causal end to part of my story. My father, then Staff Sergeant Thomas F. Cahill, USAAF, served in WW2 as a gunner and radio operator on a B-17 bomber. As the father of eight children, you might think his war stories were legendary amongst a proud family, but they were wholly untold. Quiet and secretive about his time in the service, the only story my family shared with me of note was that my mother had mistakenly put his foot locker from the service out with the trash by mistake which had greatly angered dear old dad. Whatever memorabilia was inside, we will never know.

During my tweens and early teens, my father and I lived alone together in Florida in a small community made mostly of golfers and Pratt & Whitney engineers. My walls were covered with huge, glossy posters of SR-71s and F-14s advertising their P&W engines. I was fascinated with aerospace and military history. When I began building WW2 airplane models, my father opened up to me. After I built the model of the *Stuka*, there was an album full of photos showing an often out of uniform, always smiling man, who seemed to be hearing a good joke. Interspersed with the odd group photo were

Post Exchange standard photos of air-to-air combat and famous bombing raids. When I built the model of the B-17 like the one he crewed, he shared with me the name of his plane, *Duration and Six*, and showed me the photo in the album.

In 1985 we sat together after cheering the ending of an episode of Stephen Spielberg's Amazing Stories called *"The Mission"*. It was a fantastic fictional tale of a B-17 bomber crew, luck and faith. I mentioned that I wish they'd do a show about the *Memphis Belle*! My father lit up and said, *"I watched her land!"* He told me his ground zero view of the chaos and relief. I then took a chance and asked about the "Foo Fighters". My father did not care for my interest in magic, secret knowledge and UFOs when I was a child, in fact he would make fun of me for it. My father was a devout Catholic and that was all either nonsense, or evil. He was not the same bright face cheering a fresh Kevin Costner any longer. He had the ashen face I had come to know in the mirror of someone who had seen something that didn't compute, but he still had to cut wood and carry water no matter how crazy it may have been. *"I saw them. Twice, over Ploesti and again over Peenemünde."* He was adamant they were real. He did not believe they were German, and never spoke of them again. After that he got up from his chair, went to his room and brought out a long SS dagger that he claimed he "acquired" after the war in Berlin hunting stray Nazis with a temporary post-war attachment to the Office Of Special Services. I asked how he got it. He looked through me and said, *"I took it from him."* I asked if he had a gun, if he shot him, he said, *"No. I took it from him and I used it to kill him."* I didn't ask much more about his time in Berlin after that.

My father passed away from complications due to Progressive Supranuclear Palsy in 1991. He was a decorated war hero, a legendary businessman, quick to anger and violence and just as quick to forgive and forget, a courageous if imperfect man, and my friend. I miss him still today, I see him in the mirror, and I mirrored him in my own sometimes courageous and mostly imperfect past. If you know my name and don't assume me to be a rugby star or fictional TV character then you may know me as retired US Navy Chief Master-at-Arms, Sean Cahill, witness to the events of the 2004

Nimitz Tic-Tac UAP encounter. While that is a story for another time, it is not lost on me that like my father, I find myself witness to mystery while in service, but where my father found an exit to that journey, mine is just beginning.

I was introduced to Graeme by my good friends Dan Zetterstrom and Andy McGrillen. Dan asked me to review some cover art for a book Graeme was writing about Foo Fighters, we soon struck up a conversation about my father and I was offered the honour of writing this foreword, I was struck by how much Graeme brought understanding to an otherwise niche footnote of foundational UAP studies. Urban myth and legend rises from the coffee tables and pubs to meet history and fact head on. No stone left unturned, no thread left dangling and above all, all of it done with dignity and honour.

I realized that I had recognized in Graeme, a man I had never met, the very same principles instilled in me when I was initiated into the Chief Petty Officer's Mess in the midst of my career in the United States Navy. I recognized a clear mission, vision and guiding principles. I had witnessed in him qualities like hands on deck plate leadership, professionalism and character in the way he conducted himself on social media among an ever-expanding fanbase who hold him in high regard. His writing bears the mark of a master of institutional and technical expertise while maintaining flow with active communication buttressing a deep sense of heritage. The last principle that comes to mind is that of loyalty. Loyalty to humanity is the highest loyalty of all, above flag, creed or other divisive symbology. To sacrifice one's time, effort and resources to forward the common understanding could bring no higher praise from me. In every way I can think of, Graeme has moved not only the conversation forward, but the bar as to what is an acceptable investigation and report, and what is novel with Wikipedia-style footnotes. When, not if, the winds of Disclosure blow the flags of confirmation and we all stand in the same dawn of clarity, I hope Graeme is there to help write the final chapters of this epic and fantastic play we all star in. I think he has the prologue down pat.

In the last few years I have been very fortunate to not only meet my heroes in person, but to be told by others that I made their short list of the worthy. Graeme makes my list. Thank you my friend, for me, and for Staff Sergeant Cahill, USAAF, 1923-1991.

Sean C. Cahill
San Diego, California
August 2021

Staff Sergeant Thomas F. Cahill (standing, second from left) with the other members of his United States Army Air Force B-17 Flying Fortress crew during WW2. The B-17F in the background (lacking the chin turret of the G-series aircraft) wears the numbers ‘0573’ on its nose. This would in all likelihood make it 42-30573, part of a batch of 85 bombers built and then delivered by Boeing to Cheyenne Army Air Field, Wyoming, in June 1943. (Photograph courtesy of Sean Cahill)

Boeing B-17G *Duration And Six*, the aircraft that Staff Sergeant Cahill flew in as a waist gunner in daylight raids over Europe during

WW2. He told his son Sean about witnessing strange phenomenon on two different missions whilst being based in England:

“I saw them. Twice, over Ploesti and again over Peenemünde.”

The photo of *Duration And Six* was taken at Paris in 1945. (Sean Cahill)

Prelude

2317 hours, 24th November 1944
Roßbach, Rheinland-Pfalz region of Germany

A cold but clear night surely meant one thing; the Amis would be out in strength again, sending their intruders and night-fighters over the Reich*, aware that the remaining Luftwaffe defenders had too little fuel and too few aircraft to trouble them. The enemy could fly over German-held territory with almost absolute impunity. At least, that had been the situation for the last few months. Until tonight.*

An alarm sounded, signifying that the local Wurzburg-Riese ground station had picked up the approach of an intruder, a single aircraft, possibly a Mosquito night-fighter or one of the Beaufighters the British had lent to the Americans. A sudden flurry of movement erupted in a small clearing on the forested hilltop above the town, as layers of camouflage netting were removed and three fuel tankers raced into position, hooded headlights barely illuminating the site.

Each truck parked next to a small, spherical-shaped object about half the size of a Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighter, and Luftwaffe ground personnel hurriedly ran fuel hoses to each one, jamming nozzles into flaps and turning on the supply. Fuelling took less than a minute, and the trucks then raced away again into the trees. The ground crews carried out their final checks and gave the universal "thumbs-up" before they too scurried away out of sight. Each of the three objects spluttered into life, rings of greasy black smoke being ejected from their circumferences, quickly replaced by sharp red haloes that lit up the clearing with an eerie demonic glow.

The camouflaged control bunker on the edge of the clearing was a further hive of activity. Each of the spheres had its own dedicated controller and liaison officer, the latter providing the all-important updates from the radar station on where the enemy aircraft were. In the darkened recesses of the bunker, its stale air augmented by sweat and cigarette smoke, they had carried out their last-minute equipment checks, chatter being kept to a bare minimum. That

would not last. Although just one target had been reported, there would undoubtedly be more before the night was over, and the bunker was about to become a very noisy place indeed. It was simply now a question of waiting until the enemy aircraft wandered within range. If it maintained its current heading, that would not be long now.

“Achtung! Zeil in Reichweite! Starten sie den ersten Feuerball!”

With a deepening of the glow around its circumference and a deafening roar, the first Feuerball aerial flak mine leapt off its stand and shot upwards, a red-hot poker rapidly disappearing into the darkness. Staring intently at his instruments, monitoring velocity, altitude, and direction, its controller altered flight inputs in response to the constant stream of co-ordinates being fed by his liaison officer, allowing the course of the enemy aircraft to be tracked as accurately as possible. Sixty seconds to the vicinity of the target, and everything was proceeding as per their rigorous training courses. Even so, there was no time for complacency.

Onboard the twin-engined Northrop P-61A Black Widow night-fighter, the two American aircrew were equally as alert. Now over enemy territory, even though the night defences were nowhere near as potent as they had once been, it took just one careless moment for their mission to end in disaster. The crew were looking for targets of opportunity, either solo Luftwaffe aircraft out on night-training flights or night-harassment sorties, or better still, road convoys consisting of troops and tanks using the cover of darkness to move up to the front line. If the Germans had tried that in broad daylight, they would have been spotted and blown to bits by the Thunderbolts and Typhoons. Even at night, though, the large twin-engined Widow could do a lot of damage to soft-skinned trucks and troops caught out in the open with its four fuselage-mounted Hispano cannon and four turret-mounted machine-guns. Some outfits flew with a gunner as a third crew member, but not this one. The radar operator, seated in his isolated compartment in the rear of the Widow’s fuselage gondola, had his own sighting and firing controls for the remote

turret. He studied the dim glow of the SCR-720 Airborne Intercept radar scope at his station aft of the wings. No enemy aircraft in range. Carrying out yet another visual check through the aft gondola windows and the rear-facing Plexiglass tail-cone, he could see nothing in sight. Maybe the Luftwaffe was finally finished as a fighting force, and they could all go home.

“Ziel nähert sich, Reichweite acht Kilometre, auf Automatik umschalten!”

The Feuerball operator pressed a large red button on his console and then sat back in his chair, breathing a heavy sigh of relief. The weapon was now within eight kilometres of the enemy aircraft, and he had just given it autonomous control. His part in the mission was over. Now it was all down to the ingenious “special apparatus” fitted inside the device itself, which would acquire, track and home in on the target aircraft automatically. The controller did not know the exact details of how the system operated, nor did he really care. Test launches against “friendly” aircraft proved that the device’s auto-guidance function definitely worked, but in the old Prussian general’s time-honoured phrase, “no plan survives first contact with the enemy.” Maybe this weapon would prove the old man wrong. If all went well in practice, the Amis would have no idea about what was to hit them.

The P-61’s radar operator thought he had caught sight of a hazy return on his scope, but it vanished as soon as it appeared. Had it been a real contact, or one of the “glitches” the radar technicians back at base liked to talk about but could not fix? He rubbed his eyes with gloved fingers in an attempt to keep focussed. Nothing there now. Just a false alarm, and not the first time either. Another quick look out to see if there was anything visual and….

“Contact! Visual with bogey coming up extremely fast! Below and behind us, starboard quarter! Not on the radar scope!”

The pilot acknowledged with a few curt expletives, throwing the Black Widow into a violent turn so that the radar operator could aim the turret guns towards the threat coming up from astern. As he reversed his turn to throw the bogey off, the pilot briefly looked over his shoulder and could see it coming up fast, ignoring his futile attempts to evade. A red glow, looking like a fiery halo, was barrelling in on them at extremely high speed. Was it one of those new Nazi jet aircraft they'd all heard about? A loud, staccato chatter and seat-trembling vibration reverberated right through the P-61, announcing that the radar operator had opened up with the turret-mounted Browning machine-guns. Halfway through the short burst of fire, the tracer rounds finally reached the area of sky where the halo was, and the latter suddenly changed direction, leaping upwards at tremendous speed. Less than a second later, it was lost to the radar operator's sight.

"Could have sworn I hit that thing! What the hell was it? Where'd it go?"

Seconds later, the red halo suddenly appeared off the Widow's starboard wingtip. On this occasion, there was no time to react. A bluish-violet glow, reminiscent of St Elmo's Fire, simultaneously appeared around the wingtips and tailplane of the P-61, whilst the rest of the aircraft was bathed in a huge electrostatic field that began to prickle the pilot's exposed skin. The aircraft's two Double Wasp engines, which up until that point in time had performed flawlessly, suddenly coughed in unison, faltered, and shut down together as one. The SCR-720 set and the radio had already been fried by the electrostatic charge, although this was the least of the crew's worries. The P-61 was flying like a house brick by this point, diving out of control, its propellers windmilling uselessly, and the pilot wrestled with the joystick and rudder pedals to try and maintain some sort of equilibrium so that his radar operator could bale out safely.

The Black Widow crashed into a remote hillside in the Schwarzwald, its pilot just managing to extricate himself from his

doomed machine before it ploughed into the ground. It was the first success for the new Feuerball aerial flak mine, which was now speeding back to its home base for re-use, and six more Allied aircraft would be lost to devices from the Roßbach launch site that night. Four more sites were about to become operational and still more were to come. At the eleventh hour, the balance of power in the night skies above Germany had just altered in favour of the Nazis.

The above account is, of course, a figment of my imagination. For the avoidance of doubt, it never happened. However, according to a book that was published in Italy back in 1968, then fiction may have become fact. *Feuerball* was one of two spherical-shaped weapons systems that were supposed to have existed in one form or another during World War 2, and which, according to the author, formed the basis for the plethora of "Foo Fighter" reports recorded during the last months of the war. It all sounded too good to be true. Were two hitherto-unknown secret projects ultimately responsible for the sightings of mysterious lights seen by Allied aircrew?

If this were not enough to contemplate, in the early 1950s, a small group of separate individuals claiming to have worked on Nazi disc-shaped flying vehicle projects, provided newspapers in several European countries with stories about their supposed wartime "research". They made similar claims about German discs being mistaken for Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs), although it was the post-war sightings that they were referring to. Some post-war researchers and commentators have suggested that these devices were actually being tested during WW2, and therefore the German flying saucer myth has become, whether people like it or not, part of the overall "Foo Fighter" subject. These "Nazi UFOs", if one believes in them, clearly had the potential to keep Germany from total collapse, but instead of being paraded with the spoils of war after the end of hostilities, were totally unknown until the newspaper articles appeared in the 1950s. The claims were subsequently repeated, often verbatim, in the coming decades courtesy of neo-Nazi publications, conspiracy theory websites and books. They were put

forward by individuals who may have wished to embellish the technological advances that Germany had accomplished during the war or cater for a section of UFO enthusiasts susceptible to such tales. But was there any truth in these assertions, or those of the Italian author?

Stories of strange objects and lights had already made the newspapers as early as December 1944, but it wasn't until a year later when an article printed in an American magazine provided some sense of scale regarding how many weird encounters had occurred over the last seven months of the war. For the next 45 years, Ufology was almost silent regarding WW2 cases, but the discovery of unit reports in the mid-1990s changed all that.

As we will see, stories and reports of "Foo Fighters", "Balls of Fire" and other strange phenomenon were made across the territories contested in Europe during WW2, from the tip of northern Norway down to North Africa, and from the Bay of Biscay across to the Eastern Front. The sightings also spanned almost the entire war, starting during the invasion of Belgium in May 1940 and running through until the end of April 1945, when Germany was all but defeated. Several important questions arise as a result of the "Foo Fighter" sightings. What were these strange lights and other objects that seemed to run rings around Allied bombers and night-fighters, defying all attempts to identify them? Were they German secret weapons fitted with radical technology, machines that were subsequently destroyed at the end of the war to prevent their capture by the Allies or the Russians? Did one or both of these countries find and seize these devices once the war was over? Had the Nazis built a fleet of flying discs towards the end of WW2, and if so, what happened to them afterwards? Was any of this technology given to Japan? Or were these strange lights and objects something else again, forerunners of the UFOs that have been reported in the skies around the world since the late 1940s and are currently being reported by US Navy aviators off the coast of America?

This book looks at all of these questions.

Introduction

The phenomenon is seen as a light moving very fast.

- Excerpt from a November 1944 RAF intelligence report.

For many years now, the modern UFO phenomenon is believed to have begun in 1947 with two incidents, namely Kenneth Arnold's sighting of nine crescent or heel-shaped objects flying in line formation over the Cascade Mountains on 24th June 1947, plus the alleged crash and subsequent retrieval of a mysterious craft near Roswell, New Mexico around a fortnight later. After the latter object was originally categorised by military authorities as being nothing more than an ordinary "weather balloon", the incident was forgotten about until one of the central witnesses finally broke his 31-year silence in 1978, reopening the whole case.[1] Details of the alleged Roswell crash swiftly gained world-wide attention due to a book about the case that was published in 1980, which provided the catalyst for a new generation of people intrigued by "flying saucer" reports from around the world.[2] Whilst it has waxed and waned at times over the ensuing seventy-four years, the UFO issue has never entirely gone away, although after a period that saw the subject effectively sitting in the doldrums in the early 2000s, the topic received a much-needed shot in the arm with the 16th December 2017 bombshell article *Glowing Auras and Black Money: The Pentagon's Mysterious UFO Program*, which was published in *The New York Times*.[3]

UFOs, or to use the term that has gained traction among proponents of the phenomenon in recent years, Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon (UAP), have been reported since antiquity. However, this does not mean that alien beings have visited our planet since the Dawn of Man. Without further information, it is impossible to know what the multitude of reported objects were and where, or maybe even when they came from. People have seen strange things

appear in the skies for centuries, things they could reconcile with items they were familiar with, such as the Moon, Venus, meteors and comets. Once the Industrial Age arrived, people began to see objects that seemed to be just ahead of the contemporary technology that was in use on Earth when such reports occurred. Evidence of this comes from the wave of strange airship sightings in the 1890s and early 1900s, when our own technology in this respect was in its infancy, and the “Ghost Fliers” of the 1920s and 1930s, which involved mysterious aircraft noted flying over remote locations and in weather conditions which would have been beyond the abilities of pilots and their machines at the time.[4]

A spate of over 2,000 separate so-called “Ghost Rocket” sightings were subsequently reported in Sweden and Finland during 1946, with witnesses in other European countries seeing much smaller numbers of similar objects.[5] These reports were written off at the time by many commentators as Russian testing of captured German missiles and rockets, especially as the wartime Peenemünde launch site was located only 90km across the Baltic Sea from Sweden’s southern coastline. However, despite numerous claims to the contrary, the former V-2 missile testing establishment was never used by the Soviets for its original purpose as they preferred to keep post-war research and “their” tame German rocket scientists under close supervision in the USSR. There was of course another reason why they did not use the facility. In May 1947, a group of British newspaper reporters were permitted to visit Peenemünde, presumably under close supervision, reporting that *“the Russians had completed the RAF destruction [in August 1943] by extensive demolitions.”* One reporter commented as follows:

“I can report that Peenemünde has ceased to exist as a military or research centre.”[6]

However, lost among the plethora of UFO sightings and commentary that filled pages of newspapers and flying saucer enthusiast newsletters around the globe in the early 1950s were a forgotten

crop of sightings, namely the “Foo Fighters” which had been seen over Europe, and to a slightly lesser extent in the Pacific, during WW2. Apart from one or two reports that were quickly glossed over in favour of more “juicy” contemporary cases, authors of the 1950s, 1960s and even 1970s suggested that there was a distinct lack of reports from the war. Frank Edwards, writing in his book *Flying Saucers – Serious Business*, confirmed the apparent lack of reports:

“For twenty years, 1926-1946, there is an almost complete absence of sightings reports of UFOs.”[7]

However, the British author Robert Chapman, in the foreword of his 1969 book *Unidentified Flying Objects*, alluded to at least some encounters:

“Flying saucers got off to a flying start near Mount Rainier, Washington, although they had been seen in different guises at different places long before.”[8]
This was not just a reference to Arnold’s June 1947 sighting but was quite vague about the previous incidents. If Chapman’s readers wanted further details regarding the earlier cases, they were going to have to look further afield. Even when authors managed to reference the “Foo Fighters”, they barely received more than a cursory mention. D. A. Seargent, writing in his 1978 book *UFOs: A Scientific Engima*, only managed to include a brief hint of what happened during the war:

“We need only remember the ‘Foo Fighters’, those mystery balls of fire seen by wartime pilots, looking so much like secret weapons, yet apparently quite harmless….”[9]

At least here was a description of the phenomenon, if not details of any actual cases. Unfortunately, however, most books written up until the mid-1990s on the subject of UFOs failed to mention the

“Foo Fighters” at all. It was as though they had never existed in the first place.

Even as late as the 1980s, an increasing number of authors appeared to give the impression that WW2 was a fairly unimportant time for reports of strange flying objects. It was not until the early 1990s that researchers started to look more seriously at the “Foo Fighter” reports in greater detail, obtaining wartime squadron records and locating the dwindling number of witnesses who were still alive and willing to talk about their experiences. Largely due to the information contained in a December 1945 magazine article, the 1990s search centred on American night-fighter crew sightings occurring in late 1944 and early 1945. As we will see, the phenomenon existed well beyond those years and that group of airmen.

There were some early attempts to cover more incidents, but they were sporadic and in many cases, exaggerated. In 1954, brief details of the “Foo Fighter” phenomenon were included in a book written by the British author Harold T. Wilkins, renowned for creating sensational accounts of strange encounters[10]. He had also written on the subject for *Fate* magazine three years earlier. In 1962, *Flying Saucer Review’s* magazine also carried an article that examined what little information was to hand. Both Wilkins and FSR repeated the fallacy that the “Foo Fighters” had begun at the end of 1944 and appeared to be a solely American experience, although at least FSR included an account of a much earlier sighting during the war, one involving a Polish crew in the RAF. However, the focus back then was on more contemporary UFO cases, and it seems that no efforts to trace other witnesses were made. Several reports appeared in UFO newsletters such as Len Stringfield’s *Civilian Research, Interplanetary Flying Objects*, but details were sparce and again, no follow-up action appears to have been taken. Although these seemed to be credible sources of information, their limited distribution confined the cases to a small sub-section of readers within those already interested in the UFO phenomenon. More information was in fact out there, but those searching for details had

to know where to look. French authors including Michel Bougard and Henry Durrant covered several wartime cases in their books published in the 1970s, although neither of these were translated into English and therefore did not reach a world-wide audience. One country that appeared somewhat reticent about UFO sightings in general in the 1950s was West Germany, as it was busy undergoing industrial, cultural and social change following the war. WW2 itself was a topic best shied away from, therefore it was little wonder that former *Luftwaffe* airmen were quite reluctant to come forward with details of their own wartime encounters. It is also unlikely that the Communist authorities in East Germany would have allowed public discussion of strange wartime flying devices, as Soviet policy at that time was to suppress all mention of UFOs, it being believed that they formed some sort of Western psychological warfare experiment.[11] The subject did not exist in large parts of the Eastern bloc at that time, particularly in Romania, where the topic only started to be discussed widely in the late 1960s.[12]

If tales of “Foo Fighter” sightings were not grabbing the headlines in the press during the early 1950s, several individuals, all claiming to have had connections with German secret weapons projects during the war, certainly were. These people put forward their own incredulous tales, each sharing a common theme. If their claims were to be believed, the strange objects and lights seen in the wartime skies of Europe were nothing more than disc-shaped craft undergoing development by the Nazis. If that were not enough to swallow, some of them also suggested that UFOs witnessed in the post-war period were built using plans captured by the victors at the end of WW2, presumably by the Soviets but possibly by the Americans as well. Just to throw even more confusion into the mix, in the late 1960s, an Italian author published a book containing myths that are perpetuated by countless individuals in print and on websites to this day. His book gave details of two hitherto unknown German wartime secret weapon projects involving spherical-shaped devices equipped with apparatus that allowed them to knock enemy bombers out of the sky. I managed to obtain my own copy thirty

years ago. It was all very confusing. Just what was causing the WW2 and post-war sightings – flying discs, ball-shaped vehicles, or both?

At least one German aircraft designer did experiment with the concept of disc-shaped aircraft during WW2, and there is photographic evidence to back this statement up. In the late 1930s, a German farmer tinkered with models of circular-winged aircraft. Whilst not successful in his small-scale endeavours, his work resulted in a prototype being constructed. However, the claims made in the Italian and German press by various individuals who alleged they were associated with exotic, high-performance flying discs and spherical-shaped devices are clearly describing craft operating on a much higher level than anything that the farmer produced. Claims of performance figures that would not seem out of place today were even suggested. Despite offering no evidence to back up these wild tales, these statements have been accepted, largely without question, in sections of the UFO community for many years. References still pop up on social media platforms from time to time, their proponents eager to demonstrate how secret wartime German projects are the key to unlocking the UFO mystery. They even occasionally appear in mainstream media coverage, much to the disappointment of serious researchers. Although many attempts have been made over the years to challenge the "testimony" and backgrounds of those making the original claims, the myth of Nazi UFOs has never gone away. It has permeated popular culture, with the crowd-funded *Iron Sky* movies and numerous works of fiction. For those wishing to create their own Nazi flying saucers in miniature, plastic model kits are even available of the more outlandish designs, although one item was recently withdrawn from sale in Germany as it "contravened the historical record".[13]

In writing this book, my intentions are to highlight the numerous "Foo Fighter" cases that occurred during WW2 and also the many sightings that occurred before the phrase was even coined. In addition, I felt obliged to examine the post-war claims of those alleging involvement in flying disc or spherical-shaped projects. I stop well short of detailed discussion regarding some of the more

fantastical claims regarding German contact with aliens that emerged during the 1980s, and in particular the alleged links with beings from Aldebaran. In my opinion, the latter belong in the fiction side of the library. Those interested in such tosh are, of course, free to search the books and websites on this aspect of the subject for themselves. The topic of Nazi flying discs has always been extremely vague, both in terms of the designers supposedly involved in the projects and the actual devices they claimed to have built. However, the limited amount of details that exist is, I believe, enough to formulate an opinion, one backed by facts and not just claims, about the statements made by those supposedly involved with the projects that have come to be known as Nazi UFOs.

Writing this book was not done solely through the eyes of someone interested in UFOs. For fifty years I have been both an aviation enthusiast and a student of WW2 history, largely focussing on *Luftwaffe* aircraft and secret weapons but also researching the histories of airfields in my home county of Northumberland. I am therefore quite accustomed to finding and deciphering official records, unit histories and details of aircraft and weapons employed by both sides during WW2. This book brings together three of my interests: aircraft, wartime German technology and UFOs.

In addition, this is also a wartime aviation history book, which I hope will appeal to those who wish to read about aircrews who were confronted with objects that, in the words of one witness, *"just had no right to be there".* In discussions of alleged disc projects, I have also included details of some of the less well-known German secret weapons projects that existed, which provide a fascinating insight into "what could have been". All of these were real, even if they never progressed much beyond the drawing board, let alone operational use, but they at least have documentation to prove they actually existed. Although numerous records were lost or destroyed by the Germans in the last months of the war, it is surprising how much remains, with many weapons programmes born in the chaos of the last year of the *Third Reich* still having paperwork, photographs and even testimony from the project leaders and others associated with them. There are also fake weapon systems included

in the text, but I have been at pains to call these out as they are a distraction from the overall study of the “Foo Fighters”.

The book only deals with the “Foo Fighter” phenomenon as it related to Europe between 1940 and 1945. Although my interest in WW2 has at times covered Japanese aircraft and weapons, living in the UK has meant I have always concentrated more on matters much closer to hand. However, the “Foo Fighters” were of course also witnessed over the Pacific Theatre and depending on whether this book proves popular with readers, I may decide to cover the Far Eastern sightings in a follow-up volume. However, I have explored whether German technology that could have accounted for such sightings was actually handed over to the Japanese before the end of the war in Europe.

Whilst I do not claim to be a UFO expert, I have absorbed a wealth of detail since the 1970s. However, in the absence of hard evidence and in common with researchers who are much more experienced than me, I still have no real idea what the phenomenon in general represents. To borrow a phrase from the well-respected Las Vegas reporter and UFO investigator George Knapp, *“after all these years, I know more but understand less.”* I would also add *“and am starting to believe less”* to Knapp’s words. Looking at the “Foo Fighter” cases in depth opened my eyes. I was amazed to find major holes in the accepted wisdom peddled on behalf of this small section of the overall UFO subject. There are several alleged incidents which form part of the legend of the “Foo Fighters” that are at best, tall stories and at worst, out-and-out hoaxes. At least two of the latter were actually created by the author of a book on UFOs. Although I have explained these in detail so that they can be dismissed in future, I do not consider myself to be a UFO “debunker”. However, perpetuating falsehoods as fact serves no real purpose other than to muddy the waters and turn people away from the subject. Hoaxes should be highlighted so that researchers, the wider public and influential figures in society can focus their time and attention on the minority of reported incidents that warrant further study.

This book should have been written twenty or thirty years ago, and I will regret doing so until my dying day, Due to the passage of time, witnesses to “Foo Fighter” type encounters during WW2 are now either deceased or in extreme old age. It has therefore proved impossible to contact the few remaining survivors directly. However, there are logbook entries and letters written by the aircrew involved, and in addition to these, a wealth of official Allied military records exist and are publicly available. The latter are listed as footnotes to the text so that readers can look at my sources themselves. Squadron records, mission reports and intelligence briefings all survive in various archives although the same cannot be said for German or Russian reports, as I have found it impossible to obtain them. Writing this book during the Covid-19 pandemic has made it impossible to travel to Germany in order to study available official records held regarding *Flak* and *Luftwaffe* night-fighter units during WW2. A limited number of online German military records are available, but I have not been able to locate any mention of strange lights or other phenomenon among them. The few cases involving *Luftwaffe* and Soviet Air Force personnel included here are somewhat suspect due to a lack of details concerning units, dates and locations, namely information that can be checked and verified. However, German records, where they do actually exist, have been used to explain parts of the “Foo Fighter” phenomenon from the “enemy” perspective, especially when *Luftwaffe* aircraft or anti-aircraft weapons were suspected as being the reason for strange reports.

No doubt there will be hundreds of other sightings that are either buried away in pilots’ logbooks or in official files, either long since destroyed or not looked at yet by researchers. I cannot therefore claim that the cases in the following chapters represent an exhaustive list. They are simply the ones I was able to find whilst researching and writing this book – although as you will see, there are lots of them.

On the face of it, some of these cases may be dismissed by debunkers as simply being enemy aircraft and rockets. Whilst this may well be true in a fraction of incidents, I have tried to explain why

these explanations do not hold water in the majority of cases. Using knowledge of German wartime secret weapons research and aircraft deployments, it is possible to claim that these encounters represent something out of the ordinary, showing levels of technology way beyond what Germany could field at the time or had under development. Debunkers usually pick out certain features from a case and assign plausible explanations acceptable to casual onlookers, ones that under scrutiny, do not fit the unique circumstances of the event. I therefore invite you to check my conclusions as to why wartime technology could not have provided the kinds of objects, lights or disc-shaped vehicles discussed in this book. I would be happy to discuss any hard evidence that supports a different conclusion.

You may find some similarities between two of the RAF encounters in 1943 and the now infamous case that took place in November 2004 where US Navy F-18 Super Hornets encountered the so-called “Tic Tac”. I wrote an article for the American ideas, science and technology news website *The Debrief* in April 2021, describing how certain elements of these cases, the “dogfighting” and an ability to “run rings around” current top-of-the-line combat aircraft, did not appear to have changed much over the intervening sixty year period.[14] I was astounded to see that my piece was endorsed by no less than Christopher Mellon, the former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence in both the Bill Clinton and George Bush administrations. [15] Chris Mellon is better known in UFO/UAP circles for his association with the former Director of the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP), Luis Elizondo, plus their work with Tom de Longe’s To The Stars Academy. Although my default position for the UFO subject is *“I don’t know, I need more data”*, it may be that the phenomenon has been around for a long time, possibly in different guises depending on the point in history. If this is correct, then the “Foo Fighters” are simply an earlier manifestation of whatever is now being encountered by US Navy aviators on a seemingly regular basis. It is therefore time that governments around the world were much more transparent with the

public regarding this subject, and the recent UAP Task Force report was sorely welcomed as a first step towards achieving this goal, even if its contents were not appreciated by everyone who has an interest in UFOs.

Whether fact or fiction, the whole subject of “Foo Fighters” and Nazi UFOs is an intriguing tale, and one that I have been interested in for nearly four decades, along with the other less exotic but nonetheless ingenious weaponry that was produced or under development in Germany during the war. I can only present the facts, theories, claims and untruths about so-called Nazi UFOs as I see them, and so in the end, it is up to the reader to exercise their own judgement as to whether my own conclusions are valid.

The “Foo Fighters” themselves present more of a challenge, since they appear to defy rational explanation in light of what is known about German secret weapons technology during the war. Given that it is now almost eighty years since the events in this book took place, there is little chance that official files will be discovered that demonstrate a Nazi explanation for this phenomenon. Rather than throw out half-baked theories or claim any particular “insider knowledge”, I have instead attempted to explain what the “Foo Fighters” were not, which hopefully leaves their true nature, origin, and purpose open to more informed speculation and debate.

On a more personal note, I have an extremely tenuous connection with one of the units mentioned in this book. Back in the summer of 1943, the USAAF’s 416th Night-Fighter Squadron began training on their Bristol Beaufighter Mk.VIs, cast-offs from the Royal Air Force. The Americans did not have specialised night-fighter aircraft types or variants of their own at that stage of the war, so their British allies donated some of their own. The 416th was trained in the dark art of night-fighting by the RAF at Acklington airfield, located in Northumberland, northern England – just two miles from where I live. There were six accidents involving Beaus at Acklington before the Americans headed off with their new mounts to North Africa, the final one taking place on 1st August 1943 when V8832, piloted by Lieutenant McIntyre, crashed near Chevington railway station. The railway station and the airfield are long gone, consigned to history,

whilst the site of the crash is an unremarkable part of a farmer's field. Crews from the 416th would soon become part of "Foo Fighter" history. Whilst based just down the road from me, these airmen would have had no idea what they and some later colleagues would encounter whilst serving in Italy during 1944 and 1945.

To begin with, however, we shall look at incidents involving RAF bomber and night-fighter crews in WW2. Demonstrating that the phenomenon covered not just a wider timescale than suggested back in December 1945 but was also experienced by air arms other than the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) seems like the perfect place to start this investigation into the "Foo Fighters" of WW2. Let's have a look at these "UFOs Before Roswell".

Chapter 1:

Luminous Discs, Rockets, Flying Cylinders and Portholes: RAF Sightings 1940-1943

I was able to chase the light around in a circle until I could aim my four 20mm cannons at it…

- Recollections of a Hawker Hurricane pilot on a 1943 encounter.

If anyone believes that the phrase “Foo Fighters” was something former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl plucked out of his imagination as a suitable name for his new band in 1994, they will be disappointed to learn that the phrase was on the point of celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. In the post-war period, it lapsed into obscurity once “flying saucers” hit the headlines and grew to become a world-wide phenomenon. However, the subject of “Foo Fighters” never really disappeared, with claims regarding their origin soon emerging in newspapers and books during the 1950s and 1960s. These explanations would then be hijacked in the 1970s and 1980s by various neo-Nazis and others who wanted to exaggerate the technological advances made by wartime German designers, for reasons which are still not fully understood. A resurgence in interest then occurred in the mid-1990s when American UFO researchers found wartime US Army Air Force records, including unit war diaries mentioning various encounters. Before looking at the claims that the “Foo Fighters” were flying discs or hitherto unknown weapons systems, however, we first need to examine the reports made by Allied aircrew and others who witnessed strange objects in the skies over Occupied Europe. “Foo Fighters” went under different names according to who was seeing them, plus where and when sightings took place, so this phrase will be largely but not exclusively confined

to the chapter dealing with the encounters it is most commonly associated with.

Since the “Foo Fighter” mystery gained awareness among Ufologists and other interested parties in the 1950s, it has generally been assumed that the phenomenon originated in November 1944, at the time the phrase was coined. This is due to newspaper reports dealing with the subject at the time, and more specifically, an article by Jo Chamberlin entitled *The Foo Fighter Mystery*, which appeared in the *American Legion Magazine’s* December 1945 issue. He included the line *“this is the way they began”* in reference to the November 1944 sightings, suggesting that aircrew, and only American ones at that, had started witnessing them from that month onwards. This statement was subsequently accepted as “fact” and became part of the UFO legend which has spanned the last seventy-five years. It was perpetuated by several authors during the 1950s and 1960s, taking on the status of accepted wisdom well into the 1980s when I first became aware of the phenomenon. However, Chamberlin (who was a former USAAF staff officer) was almost certainly unaware of the strange lights and other luminous objects which had been witnessed by pilots and crew members flying operations over Occupied Europe for at least two-and-a-half years prior to the incidents he was referring to. Whilst it was true that the new batch of sightings that began in late November 1944 seemed to be confined to American night-fighter units operating over western Germany and northern Italy, Royal Air Force crews had reported seeing unusual lights and aerial devices many months before the USAAF carried out their first raids on targets in Germany in January 1943. In fact, digging deeper into RAF intelligence reports, one finds reports of mysterious events dating back to 1940. However, due to the censorship in the British media, plus the varying methods of compiling RAF mission reports, details of these early cases never made the headlines in the same way that the stories from the 415th Night Fighter Squadron ended up doing. US war correspondents appeared to have much more freedom in publishing details of what was happening on the front lines. During WW2, Lieutenant-Colonel

Chamberlin was an aide to General Henry “Hap” Arnold, the USAAF commander-in-chief during WW2, and subsequently had access to front-line units that the war reporters could only dream about. His December 1945 piece consisted of details obtained first-hand from crews whilst visiting the 415th NFS at their base in eastern France in January 1945, whist undertaking an official survey into the after-effects of the Allied transportation bombing campaign on behalf of his boss.

Before going onto describe the RAF cases in more detail, it is worth taking a brief moment to look at the situation in the night-time skies over Occupied Europe between 1942 and 1944, to see what conditions Allied aircrew were operating under. Although powered flight had been invented over forty years previously, it was still no mean feat to fly a multi-engined bomber at night, and often in bad weather, for hundreds of miles at a time. Navigation aids initially amounted to little more than traditional nautical position-finding by use of a compass and sextant, the aircraft’s navigator taking “star shots” using the latter via a small Perspex astrodome mounted on top of the bomber’s fuselage. According to James McCloy, a wartime RAF navigator who was interviewed for the BBC TV documentary series *The Secret War* in the late 1970s, results were often somewhat inaccurate:

“On the ground, I found the best I could do was to fix the position of the aerodrome within five miles: in the air I would have been lucky if I got within twenty miles.”[16]

Banned since the beginning of the war in 1939, an amphetamine sulphide known as Benzedrine was issued to aircrew in 1942 in order to *“promote both wakefulness and well-being”.* These tablets, soon nicknamed “wakey-wakey pills” by night bomber crews, were designed to keep them awake in *“situations of stress where sleep was regarded as a threat to performance.”*[17] The constant threat of attack from *Luftwaffe* night-fighters, damage or destruction from *flak* (anti-aircraft gun fire[18]), simple equipment failure and sheer “bad

luck" was enough to put even the most level-headed of crew members on edge at times. And yet, night after night, hundreds of aircraft headed out across the English Channel, with anywhere up to seven or sometimes even eight airmen in a single machine counting on training, teamwork, and a large slice of good fortune to carry out their mission and return home safely.

During the *Blitz* over the winter of 1940/41, the *Luftwaffe* had employed three different navigation and bombing aids, namely *Knickebein*, *X-Geräte* and *Y-Geräte*, which had been used to find and mark targets with flares and incendiary bombs for the benefit of the main bomber force. As these used directional radio "beams", once detected, it was then a relatively easy matter to work out what the target was. The British Telecommunications Research Establishment eventually came up with their own systems which did not rely on "beams" and therefore would not give the Germans advance notice for the RAF bomber force's intentions. These were known as Gee, Oboe and H2S. German air defence radar systems were operational as early as the autumn of 1940, when a network of *Freya* coastal sites came into service. They were soon supplemented by more powerful *Würzburg*, *Würzburg-Riese* and *Jagdschloss* radar units. A new war was being fought in the skies over Europe, one where simply looking for the enemy visually was no longer good enough. He also had to be found and then dealt with electronically.[19]

The bomber and night-fighter crews on both sides knew only too well that a deadly game of "cat and mouse" was being continuously played out over Germany, each occasionally gaining the upper hand for an unknown but usually brief period after a new piece of radar or counter-measures "kit" was invented and then put into service. Simple modifications included the addition of upward-firing twin 20mm Ikaria Werke MG FF or Waffenfabrik Mauser MG 151/20 cannon, known as *Schräge Musik* ("Jazz Music"), which was installed in numerous Messerschmitt Bf 110G, Dornier Do 217N and Ju 88G night-fighters. 30mm Rheinmetall-Borsig MK 108 cannon were fitted to the Heinkel He 219A *Uhu* ("Owl").[20] These quickly

reaped deadly dividends against the RAF night bomber fleet, with cannon fire tearing into the fuel tanks fitted in their wings. Apart from early production examples equipped with machine-guns in ventral turrets or locally modified “scare gun” installations, none of the RAF heavy bomber types had turrets fitted into their fuselage undersides and were therefore defenceless from below.

For almost a year, RAF heavy bomber crews enjoyed the benefits of the Monica tail warning radar system, at least until the Germans developed FuG 227 *Flensburg*, a passive radio receiver with the ability to home in on transmissions from their sets. The RAF did, however, start employing their own passive receiver, Serrate, that detected emissions from the *Luftwaffe* night-fighters’ FuG 202 *Lichtenstein B/C* and FuG 218 *Lichtenstein C-1* airborne radar sets. “Counter-measures” and “jamming” quickly became frequently-used terms in the airborne lexicon. This “cat and mouse” game continued until the end of the war, with the Allies eventually gaining the upper hand in terms of equipment used and numbers of aircraft available for operations. Electronic warfare had finally arrived.

This new brand of aerial warfare was fought by airmen who were now hunched over cathode ray tubes and other pieces of equipment crammed in tiny spaces inside their aircraft. Outside these fragile metal airframes, lights in the sky also became a regular staple of night bombing operations. However, rather than “Foo Fighters”, these were multi-coloured flares used to accurately mark targets, large decoy fires lit by the Germans, “tracer” bullets that assisted aiming by RAF air gunners, brief explosions caused by *flak* bursts and explosions from so-called “Scarecrows”, not to mention a myriad of searchlights probing the skies as part of the *Luftwaffe’s* anti-aircraft defences. To the heavy bomber crews, these items became regular sights in the skies over Europe and are regularly referred to in the official squadron records as such. However, every so often, the bomber and night-fighter crews also witnessed lights and mysterious objects that they had never seen before, ones which defied any rational explanation.

The incidents that were recorded are almost certainly just the tip of the proverbial iceberg in terms of total numbers of sightings.

Crews from other squadrons that are not listed here may have seen similar things, as it often depended on an individual unit's intelligence officers as to which details from the post-mission debriefings were included in their Operations Record Book (ORB). Mission reports usually appeared in the monthly ORB Record of Events, and a more general report, which also included crew transfers and squadron administration, appeared in the separate ORB Summary of Events. It is likely that a standard procedure was once issued. However, in practice, the amount of information listed in these files varied tremendously between units. Some only included brief overall summaries for each raid, rather than each individual crews' missions, whilst others managed to list more relevant information in the Summary of Events than in the Record of Events for the same month. Other squadron mission logs barely managed to list anything more than just the bomb loads each aircraft carried. We are therefore hamstrung by the uneven reporting of what occurred on the raids.

In addition, details of some cases featured in this book never made it into the ORBs, and without names of pilots or the identities of the units, it has been impossible to track down which units were involved. Some pilots and crews preferred to keep quiet about their encounters in case they were ridiculed or regarded as mentally unfit for duty. Others chose not to report strange phenomenon since these were regarded as commonplace among their colleagues and, as they did not seem to be hostile, previous reports had not been followed up by intelligence staff. On the handful of occasions where officialdom did intervene, crews on the squadrons never received answers regarding the nature of the lights they reported. Unfortunately, not all airmen who had sightings of strange phenomenon survived their "tour" of operations, decreasing still further the numbers of people that were available to talk about their wartime sightings when UFO reports started to be published in the post-war period. It also appears that the sightings that were included in the likes of FSR and CRIFO were never followed up once their details had been published. In that pre-Internet age, it would have

been difficult but not impossible to locate the surviving colleagues of those who reported such events, in order to obtain confirmation.

However, it is no use lamenting courses of action that could have been taken. Instead, let's delve into the reports and the sightings.

1940

Whilst it does not give the exact details of the encounters concerned, or even their dates, an RAF intelligence report dated 11th August 1940 titled *"Phenomenon Connected With Enemy Night Tactics"* includes the details of "peculiar incidents" recorded during operations over Occupied Europe:

"It is difficult to assess the accuracy of some of the reports, where enemy aircraft have not attacked, or have not approached close enough to be identified with certainty, and where the reports have not been substantiated by more than one member of the crew."

Nearly one hundred reports of strange incidents had apparently been lodged, including mysterious aircraft following bombers without attacking, and vague shapes witnessed in the darkness. The writer of the report then described the conditions under which such sightings occurred:

"The strain upon a member of the crew maintaining a vigilant look out for long periods of time is intense, and, under such conditions, the stories of shadowing are apt to stimulate the very natural tendency to think that any unidentified shape seen, or imagined in the sky, is an enemy aircraft."

The same report stated that out of 92 occasions, just one was confirmed by another member of the crew involved. In other words, intelligence staff believed that airmen might be seeing things whilst under the huge strain of operations, and if only one member of a bomber crew reported something odd, it was more than likely a

figment of his imagination. This approach by RAF air intelligence staff persisted well into 1942. The conclusion drawn at the time was that the enemy was experimenting with some kind of new secret weapon, as the same report concluded:

"It is a quite well known practice for the Germans to test experimental apparatus under active service conditions and it appears highly probable that some of the peculiar incidents reported by pilots have been due to some new detection device or searchlight installed for experimental purposes."[21]

In fact, the Germans were doing no such thing. However, this erroneous belief would be a continuing mantra throughout the war when sightings of strange lights and objects were reported by returning aircrews.

1942

What may have been the first case involved a Polish-crewed Wellington bomber returning to England from a raid on Germany. An account of the sighting appears in Mack Maloney's *UFOs in Wartime*, published in 2011. Although the author was unsure of the date of the encounter, it involved Flight Lieutenant Roman Sabinski. According to the author, the following event occurred:

"A member of 301 Squadron of a Polish division attached to the RAF, on either March 25 or June 25, 1942 (as no exact report exists). Sabinski was flying a Wellington bomber over the Zuider Zee, off the coast of Holland. The flight had been routine until Sabinski's rear gunner called him on the plane's interphone. Some kind of flying object was approaching their plane from behind. Disk shaped and luminous, it seemed to be several miles away."

Despite the rear gunner's estimate of distance, he told the pilot it was bigger than the full moon. Sabinski ordered his tail gunner to

open fire and the latter did so once the object had approached to within 200 yards. However, the machine-gun rounds proved ineffectual. *"The rounds simply disappeared once they struck the disk."* After a couple of minutes, the mysterious object shot forward, taking station off the bomber's port wingtip. This time, both the Wellington's front and rear gun turrets opened up, yet still there was no effect on the luminous disc. Sabinski tried to evade the object by entering into a series of manoeuvres but it remained off his wingtip. There was a final, futile attempt to shoot it down by his gunners. Finally, the mysterious disc shot forward again, this time to a point ahead of the bomber, remaining there for a short period before streaking upwards and finally disappearing. Back on the ground and undergoing the usual post-raid debriefing by his intelligence officer, Sabinski mentioned the incident but was *"asked if he had been drinking."* However, again according to Maloney, the Polish pilot's story was supposedly corroborated by the pilot of a second Wellington which had been flying some distance behind him at the same time that the mystery object was encountered.[22] This pilot has, to my knowledge, never been identified.

Maloney was repeating a story that had appeared in *Le Livre noir des soucoupes volantes* ("The Black Book of Flying Saucers"), written by French author Henry Durrant and published in 1970. According to Durrant, as soon as the Wellington's tail gunner opened fire on the orange-coloured disc, *"several projectiles seem*[ed] *to have entered the luminous circle, but without result, although the object* [was] *within good range (approximately 150 m)."*[23] Whatever the object was, it seemed impervious to the gunner's Browning 0.303-inch machine-guns. However, the Frenchman did not give details of how he obtained the pilot's story, although once I started looking into the case, it looks as though it first appeared in the March/April 1962 issue of *Flying Saucer Review*, courtesy of a correspondent in Vancouver who apparently obtained the details directly from the pilot. FSR provided a brief account of the incident, just a paragraph in length, and Durrant had effectively repeated this. Maloney's version is slightly longer but uses the same details,

padding it out slightly. The FSR report provided some figures, presumably estimates from the pilot:

"The object was of a glowing orange colour. It appeared at 15,000 feet about 100 or 200 yards away. Its speed was estimated at 180 mph, but disappeared at an estimate speed of 1,000 mph."

The FSR report also confirmed the date as being in March 1942.[24] A much briefer version of the same story is also featured in Richard Dolan's *UFOs & The National Security State*, published in 2000, although the pilot's name and the squadron are not mentioned. The same story appears in *Haunted Skies: Volume One*, written by John Hanson and Dawn Holloway in 2010, although they did not provide much detail beyond what was given in FSR or Durrant's book.[25] However, a longer account is included in Keith Chester's excellent book *Strange Company*, published in 2007. He quotes from *MUFON Journal No.290* of March 1993, which included among the sightings listed in its *Looking Back* section, an interview with the pilot, who was referred to as *"Flight Lt Ronan Savinsky, Squadron 301 of the Royal Air Force, Polish Division".* His sighting was also listed as having occurred in June 1942, which is possibly where Maloney's confusion stems from. According to the report in the *MUFON Journal*, Savinsky and his crew were on the return flight from their target that night when his rear gunner reported an aircraft approaching from behind:

"I told him if this object comes too close, then we will have to open fire on him. My idea was that it was perhaps a German fighter equipped with a searchlight in the nose. So, when this thing came close, I wouldn't take any chance on it, and I told my rear gunner to give him a blast."

The rear turret gunner opened up at around 200 yards. Maximum range for the 0.303-inch Browning machine-guns fitted in the Wellington was well over 1,000 yards but in practice gunners fired at

much shorter ranges to ensure accuracy. At that distance, Savinsky described the object as being *"about the size of the moon, which was also visible at the same time, maybe a lot bigger."* The gunner watched as his tracer rounds entered the target. Savinsky stated that his rear gunner had fired on the object for around two minutes without visible sign of damage being inflicted. It is likely that the gunner used short bursts then watched for effect, otherwise his ammunition would have been exhausted quickly.

"Now the peculiar thing about it was that they were just going in and that was the end of it; they wouldn't fall away. Those tracers would just enter and that was it. That lasted for maybe two minutes and after that time this shiny object changed position and at terrific speed moved over to our port side, almost at the same distance, about 200 yards from the wing, and then it stayed there."

As it was now maintaining station some distance from their port wingtip, the front gunner was able to bring his own guns to bear on the object:

"Then both the rear gunner and front gunner opened fire on my order. I could see the tracers entering the target again from the two angles. After a while it took off at fantastic speed at a 45-degree angle and just disappeared into the stars. The aircraft that was behind me had the same experience within a few minutes after I had mine."[26]

Unfortunately, Savinsky did not name or could not remember the pilot of this second Wellington bomber, and therefore this crew has never been identified. He returned to Essen the following night on a second raid on the city, but the strange object did not show up again. [27]

Rather than simply setting out the bare bones of the story and then moving on, I wanted to dive a little deeper into the pilot's history, in order to provide some much-needed context to the sighting. The fascinating tale told by Maloney, based on Durrant's book and the

MUFON report or the original FSR report, is however incorrect on two points. First, the name of the Polish pilot was Roman Konstanty Sobiński, and at the time of the sighting, he was a Sergeant, not a Flight Lieutenant. Sobiński was born in Działosyn, Poland, on 1st May 1916. I have not been able to find details of how he reached England, but he must have joined the RAF before May 1941. Whilst training with No.7 Bombing & Gunnery School at RAF Stormy Down in South Wales, Sgt. Sobiński was injured on the 27th of that month when Fairey Battle Mk.I V1278 was struck by lightning. He was later posted to No.301 Sqdn, one of fifteen Polish-crewed bomber and fighter squadrons that operated under RAF control during WW2. In 1942, the squadron was based at RAF Hemswell in North Lincolnshire and operated the twin-engined Vickers Wellington Mk.IV bomber.

Sobiński survived a second crash totally unscathed, this time near Louth and involving No.301 Sqdn Wellington Z1259 on 15th January 1942 on the return from an attack on Emden. However, according to the official Operations Record Book (ORB) for No.301 Sqdn covering January 1942, he was not the pilot that day. Sobiński was the aircraft's "second pilot", sitting on a folding seat in the cockpit. In January 1942, "second dickeys", as they were referred to in RAF parlance, were pupils from training units gaining operational experience before being posted to front-line units, and only a handful of aircraft from each squadron usually had a trainee aboard. Z1259, flown by Flying Officer Sliwinski, bombed the alternate target of Emden instead of the planned Hamburg due to being unable to transfer fuel from the Wellington's reserve tank.[28] It therefore appears that Sobiński was a new pilot in the squadron when the March raid on Essen occurred. By March, however, all of the unit's bombers were carrying second pilots, almost certainly due to a change in policy by the Air Ministry regarding the wisdom of having just a single man capable of flying each aircraft.

No.301 Sqdn's Operational Record Book (ORB) for March 1942 gives a summary of the unit's contribution to the raid on Essen, with eleven Wellingtons taking off on the evening of the 25th. One aircraft

was waylaid by a fault in the onboard oxygen supply and bombed a secondary target, starting *“a fire which could be seen sixty miles away.”* For the Essen mission, Sgt. Sobiński is listed as the pilot of Wellington Mk.IV Z1317/GR-U, and there is a brief summary of his post-mission debriefing:

“[Bomb] bursts seen along railway, unable to recognise target due to ground haze. Bombed at 16,000 feet.”[29]

Sobiński had presumably told his Intelligence Officer about the disc he had encountered on the return flight, and his gunners firing upon it. However, there was no mention of this in the ORB. I have also looked through the reports for the other ten No.301 Sqdn Wellingtons sent to Essen that night, but again there is no mention of a strange object, nor is it listed on any of the other nights that month.[30] Of course, it was not unusual for events that posed little or no threat to aircraft or overall operations to be recorded, and whatever the object was, it did not appear belligerent. Anything classed as particularly sensitive by the intelligence officers may not have been listed but instead quietly passed up the chain of command for further action. However, a device seemingly impervious to machine-gun fire and capable of flying at a tremendous speed would surely have been of interest to RAF Bomber Command.

I undertook another line of enquiry via the RAF Combat Reports, which were submitted after a raid, but this only occurred if air gunners actually opened fire on an enemy aircraft. These can be found under AIR 50 at The National Archives. However, only two files relating to No.301 Sqdn during March 1942 exist. Both provide details of combats three nights after the raid where Sobiński’s crew reported seeing the luminous disc. The first deals with a “ME 109F” and a “JU 88” (a single-seat Messerschmitt Bf 109F fighter and a Junkers Ju 88 bomber converted to the night-fighter role), and the second relates to the probable shooting down of a Ju 88. The absence of information in official records does not constitute evidence that an incident did not occur. Many combat reports were

lost before being consigned to the archives. It is also possible that the Poles decided not to file claims or were advised not to do so by the intelligence staff. However, we now have two separate files where the Sobiński sighting could potentially have been recorded, but no relevant information was included.

One thing puzzled me. If the object had sat around 200 yards off the Wellington's port wing-tip, was it possible that both the nose and tail turret gunners could have sighted their target at the same time? The maximum lateral traverse of the Fraser Nash FN.4 tail turret was 88°, as the trailing edge of the tailplane would have been in the way if it had turned beyond this point. However, the Nash & Thompson FN.5 possessed a traverse of 190° in total, therefore 95° to each beam.[31] Using basic trigonometry, given the Wellington was around 64 feet long, if they were at maximum traverse, then the disc would have had to been at least 1,100 yards distant for both turrets to be able to aim and fire at it. The rear turret could not fire at a target off the aircraft's wingtip in any case. Theoretically, it was possible that both turrets could have engaged the same target at the same time, though rather unlikely. Obviously if that was the case, it's distance was many times that reported, and it was not sitting directly off the wingtip. As Sobiński was no doubt throwing his aircraft around the sky in an attempt to shake off his unwanted companion, it is more likely that each gunner simply opened fire at the target when they were able to, and not actually at the same time. In addition, instead of the bullets "striking" the disc as per Mahoney's account, they simply appeared to vanish. No visible impact or damage was seen to occur.

Although the names of the gunners who supposedly fired on the luminous disc were not listed in any of the published accounts of the case, I obtained them by looking at the ORB files. I wondered whether the other crew members might have mentioned something about the incident after the war, which may have been overlooked by the authors. The crew roster for Wellington Z1317/GR-U on the night in question was as follows:

Sgt. Roman Konstanty Sobiński Pilot (Captain)
F/O Czech Jerzy Nowacki Second Pilot
F/O Bernard Budnik Observer (Navigator)
Sgt. Zdzisław Taczalski Wireless/Telegraphy (Radio) Op
Sgt. Krzysztof Jerzy Grabowski Air Gunner (front turret)
Sgt. Stanisław Sep-Szarzynski Air Gunner (rear turret)

Sobiński flew one more mission with the same crew on the following night, again to Essen, before being effectively demoted to “second pilot” again for a raid on Hamburg on 6/7th April. Promoted to Pilot Officer on 1st April 1942, he was back in command of the same Wellington for another Essen raid on the 12/13th but two of the crew, Nowacki and Sep-Szarzynski, had been replaced by different personnel. The rear gunner vanishes from the unit records after the 13/14th. Sobiński took over another Wellington crew on the night of the 24th. Nowacki became captain of Z1317, with Budnik, Taczalski and Grabowski remaining as part of his new crew. Later in the war, Sgt. Taczalski transferred to No.1586 Flight, a special operations unit responsible for dropping supplies into Poland from bases in Italy. He died on 6th January 1944 when Consolidated Liberator Mk.III BZ589/GR-J ran off the end of the runway at Grotaglia and crashed into the sea.

Sgt. Krzysztof Grabowski, the front turret gunner, survived the war. He had been born to an aristocratic family in Poland and left the country a year before the German invasion in September 1939. After the war, he took up sailing, but was lost whilst skippering the schooner *Enchantress* in January 1964. Count Grabowski, the family who owned the boat, and the vessel itself were never found. He did however leave a legacy in the shape of an unpublished manuscript, which was completed by his sister and issued as *Casting Off* in 2012. Although a book about his post-war sailing exploits, it briefly touches upon his military career. According to the book, he moved to Chile in 1938 but sailed to England in 1941 in order to join the exiled Polish armed forces. He flew around eighty wartime missions and received the *Virtuti Militari*, the highest Polish military decoration for heroism or leadership in combat. Although the book flippantly

mentions the Bermuda Triangle in connection with his disappearance, it is a fairly straight-forward read. I will refrain from trying to suggest any link between it and an alleged wartime UFO sighting. Anyone believing that the book sees Grabowski giving insights into his RAF service or the alleged sighting over Germany in March 1942 will be sadly disappointed. It is not even mentioned, and it is debatable whether he discussed the incident with his family after the war.

I have not been able to trace Sgt. Sep-Szarzynski's subsequent movements after he left Sobiński's crew in April 1942. He did survive the war, but like so many of his countrymen, stayed in England rather than returning to communist-ruled Poland. Stanisław Sep-Szarzynski died in Cavendish, Suffolk in March 1976, aged 66. F/O Budnik also settled in England and died at Bury St Edmunds in August 1986. F/O Nowacki lived through the conflict too. He chose to return to Poland after the war and passed away in April 2003. Although Sobiński eventually mentioned his sighting to a Canadian UFO researcher, which was then passed to FSR in 1962, it appears that none of the other surviving crew members were traced or came forward to corroborate their pilot's testimony.

As there was some confusion over which month was involved in 1942, I checked the relevant ORB files for June 1942 to see whether Sobiński was involved in the "One Thousand Plane Raid" on Bremen on the evening of the 25th. On the 3rd, he flew Wellington Mk.IV Z1467/GR-L on a mission to Bremen and returned to base without injury. However, for No.301 Sqdn's next raid on the night of the 5th to Essen, he had been replaced by his "second pilot", F/O Witakowski. On 10th June 1942, Roman Sobiński was admitted to the Officer's Hospital located in Torquay, Devon, for reasons unknown.[32] The relevant ORB listing the names of all the No.301 Sqdn Wellington crews that flew on the "One Thousand Plane Raid" against Bremen on the 25th does not include Sobiński's name in any capacity. According to the ORB, he had still not returned to the squadron by the end of the month and was even listed as "out", so had permanently left the unit. It is reasonable to conclude that he either

remained in hospital, unfit for flying duties, or had been posted elsewhere. This confirms that the alleged luminous disc encounter occurred in March 1942, which ties in with the original account given to FSR in 1962. Durrant gives this as the correct date, but Maloney is not as sure. Sobiński eventually reached the rank of Flight Lieutenant and emigrated to the United States after the war ended. He died in Friday Harbor, Washington State, on 26th August 1995. Local records have him living there in February 1972 as council meeting records at that time mention a request for a water connection to his property.

To summarise Sobiński's sighting, it allegedly occurred very late on the evening of 25th March 1942, as he landed back at base at 0117 hours. The luminous disc was fired upon without any visible effect, and whilst it did not attack the Wellington bomber, it flew alongside it for a period of time before eventually disappearing upwards at a great rate of speed. Bear in mind this last characteristic, as it will feature in one of the post-war explanations for what would be known as the "Foo Fighters". Sobiński's case is almost unknown beyond Ufologists specialising in WW2 sightings and has only been included in a handful of books. Durrant's 1970 book was not translated into English, so it only reached a French readership. If a report of the encounter had been sent up the chain of command, the luminous disc would inevitably have been treated as a new German secret weapon, despite the crew's incredible account. The story did not appear in the official unit records, so we only have the pilot's testimony. None of the other surviving members of his crew confirmed his story, and no follow up action appeared to be taken by UFO investigators.

Sobiński's sighting was just the first of many such reports of unknown lights and objects. RAF bomber crews saw strange lights over the city of Aachen on 11th August 1942 and then again over Osnabrück six days later. The first occasion saw what was reported as "a white light" rising up from ground level until it reached 8,000 feet. Once at that altitude, it then *"flew on a more or less level course for about two minutes".* At least four bomber crews saw the phenomena. Other aircrew mentioned seeing what they described as

“rockets”, zig-zagging about on the ground itself before ascending in a climbing turn. Bomber Command’s Operational Research Section Report for August 1942 contained details of the Osnabrück sighting, involving a number of bomber crews who stated they saw *“a white rocket travelling horizontally at 15,000 feet, leaving a long white tail of light.”* It was apparently reported by at least four separate crews. The same report also provided details from another encounter over northern France:

“A rocket-like projectile was also shot up from the ground near Arras to about 12,000 feet. It was apparently aimed at an aircraft which took evasive action.”[33]

German missile guidance technology in 1942 was still in its infancy. No accurate target tracking system had been developed at that time, nor a *flak* missile to install such apparatus in, so whatever this object was, its close proximity to a bomber was presumably just down to chance.

Whilst definite dates were listed, there were no squadron numbers or names of the crew members that were involved in these incidents. The source of the reports was an intelligence report circulated by RAF Coastal Command[34], which may seem odd, since it was Bomber Command aircraft that had encountered the mysterious lights. However, air intelligence was usually shared between commands. At least the dates provided a starting point and therefore I commenced a trawl of the official records, looking at RAF bomber squadrons active in August 1942. Whilst encounters with *Luftwaffe* night-fighters were almost always reported in the ORBs, and in the combat reports if guns were fired, the locations were much less well documented. It therefore seemed reasonable to conclude that Aachen and Osnabrück were likely to be the cities selected for the two bombing raids in question. However, this conclusion was only half right. There was a raid on Osnabrück on the evening of the 17th, but the 11th was a night where the concentration was on Mainz, with other attacks, often involving only

one or two aircraft from each squadron, bombing various targets in France, or conducting minelaying ("Gardening") operations in the North Sea off the German coast. Aachen was clearly not the target that evening, and none of the various squadron ORBs that I consulted mention strange lights in the vicinity of the city. However, the city may well have been located on or near the course the bombers took to Mainz and therefore something odd could have been seen there. Although there were no reports in the ORBs I looked through, that did not mean there were no sightings at all that month. Reports of the lights may still lie within files that I was not able to obtain.

The intelligence report covering the 17th gave a few more details about the sighting over Osnabrück, however. According to the crews that saw the object, it was *"a rocket with a long white tail of light on the same altitude of their aircraft."* This did not fit anything listed in the ORBs as given above, so must have only been listed in the intelligence report. The description may also imply a rocket-powered aircraft similar to the Messerschmitt Me 163 *Komet*, however this type never flew at night. We will encounter further reports of this type of machine in later chapters.

Lights in the skies above Occupied Europe were not exactly new, however. RAF bomber crews, still effectively the only ones capable of carrying the war to the heart of the *Reich* itself until the Americans started their daylight raids against Germany at the beginning of 1943, occasionally reported false red or yellow Target Indicator flares some distance from the target. These may well have been dropped as decoys by *Luftwaffe* aircraft hoping to draw the bombers away from their intended targets. In addition to decoy flares, although whilst not an aerial phenomenon, the Germans often lit fires in the open countryside near major cities when a raid was approaching in order to attract enemy aircraft which, it was hoped, would drop their bombs on an already blazing "target". The Air Ministry employed a similar system known as Starfish during the height of the Blitz on Britain in late 1940. The Germans also built an entire mock factory complex 10km away from the real Krupps steel works in Essen. Dummy buildings and a system of fire and light arrays successfully

attracted RAF bombers away from the real target, and this decoy was not identified until 1943. However, such counter-measures were not usually successful, as experienced crews saw through these deceptions. Whilst it is possible that a small number of mystery lights could have been explained away by a combination of flares, ground fires, explosions, flames from the engine exhausts of other aircraft and so on, most aircrew would have recognised these. The cases where the crews resolutely stuck to their stories, finding no explanation that could fit their observations, are therefore extremely intriguing.

Flares and decoy fires on the ground could not easily explain a sighting made by the crew of an Avro Lancaster bomber in November 1942. On the evening of the 28th, No.61 Sqdn, based at Syerston in Nottinghamshire, dispatched nine Lancaster Mk.Is to attack the Fiat plants located in Turin, the aircraft skirting the western and southern borders of Switzerland before crossing the Cottian Alps. Two returned to base due to engine failure. Altogether, 194 aircraft (out of 228 that originally took off) bombed the target and three bombers were lost. One of the No.61 Sqdn Lancasters, W4767/QR-J, flown by Warrant Officer R. Lever, encountered a strange object during the mission, not once, but twice. However, the relevant squadron ORB file only provides the following summary:

“W/O Lever reported many large fires after identifying target by flares and railway North East of aiming point. He bombed from 8,000 feet seeing the burst of 4,000lb bomb.”

The crew landed safely back at Syerston at 0300 hours on 29th November.[35] Lever’s crew were listed in the No.61 Sqdn ORB as follows:

W/O R. Lever Pilot (Captain)
Sgt. Kenneth J. Albury Flight Engineer
P/O Robert Adams Navigator
Sgt. John Gibson Air Bombardier (and front turret gunner)

F/Sgt. T. Latham	Wireless/Telegraphy (Radio) Operator
F/Sgt. T. Allinson	Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
Sgt. S. D. Collins	Air Gunner (rear turret)

Missing from the summary of the sortie was their account of a huge object that the crew saw on two separate occasions, five minutes apart, after dropping their 4,000lb “Cookie” on Turin and heading back towards the Alps. On return to Syerston, Lever informed the squadron intelligence staff about their sighting. Despite repeated questioning, pilot and crew stuck to their story, and were able to convince their commanding officer, Wing Commander Richard Coad, plus the airfield’s base commander, Group Captain George (“Gus”) Walker, that they were telling the truth as they saw it. On 2nd December, three days after the crew’s sighting, a report was sent from Syerston to Headquarters, No.5 Group, RAF Bomber Command, located at St Vincent’s Hall in Grantham, Lincolnshire, detailing what Lever’s crew still maintained that they had seen. Signed on behalf of Walker by one of his staff, it was marked for the attention of a Major Mullock, an Army officer presumably attached to the HQ as “Major” was not an RAF rank. In fact, Major J. B. Mullock was from the Royal Artillery, a specialist in anti-aircraft guns and also No.5 Group’s Flak Liaison Officer. He had also flown on the Turin raid as an observer, sitting in the mid-upper gun turret of another Lancaster.[36] According to his own report of the mission, Mullock and the crew of the aircraft he was flying in did not see the strange object themselves. However, the information that related to Lever’s sighting made for extremely interesting reading:

“Report by the Crew of 61 Sqdn. a/c “J”, Captain W/O Lever, of object seen during raid on TURIN, night of November 28/29th, 1942. The object referred to above was seen by the entire crew of the above aircraft. They believe it to have been 200-300 feet in length and its width is estimated at 1/5th or 1/6th of its length. The speed was estimated at 500 m.p.h., and it had four pairs of red lights spaced at equal distances along its body. These lights did not

appear in any way like exhaust flames; no trace was seen. The object kept a level course. The crew saw the object twice during the raid, and brief details are given below:-

(i) After bombing, time 2240 hours, a/c height 11,000 feet. The aircraft at this time was some 10/15 miles South-West of Turin travelling in a north-westerly direction. The object was travelling South-East at the same height or slightly below the aircraft.
(ii) After bombing, time 2245 hours, a/c height 14,000 feet. The aircraft was approaching the Alps when the object was seen again travelling West-South-West up a valley in the Alps below the level of the peaks. The lights appeared to go out and the object disappeared from view.

The Captain of the aircraft also reports that he has seen a similar object about three months ago North of Amsterdam. In this instance it appeared to be on the ground and later travelling at high speed at a lower level than the heights given above along the coast for about two seconds; the lights then went out for the same period of time and came on again, and the object was still seen to be travelling in the same direction."[37]

Could the mysterious object have been a German aircraft that strayed into the path of Lever's Lancaster bomber? The largest operational *Luftwaffe* aircraft in WW2 was the Messerschmitt Me 323 *Gigant* ("Giant"). A large, lumbering, six-engined transport aircraft, it was developed from the initial assault glider version of the same airframe and had a wingspan of around 180 feet, only fifteen feet shorter than the Boeing 747-230 airliners flown by Lufthansa in the 1970s. Whilst its service ceiling was around 13,000 feet, the *Gigant* was only capable of reaching 175 mph. They were used as transports on the Eastern Front and the Sicily to North Africa supply route in November 1942, but it was extremely unlikely that one would have been flying at night, never mind through the mountain valleys of northern Italy in the dark. Speeds of 500 mph implied jet power, and

the handful of German turbojet-engined aircraft types under development were still in early testing phases, and never ventured outside the country. Given this, it was virtually impossible that one of the *Luftwaffe's* jet prototypes would have been flying low over the Italian Alps and at night at the end of 1942.

The largest jet design to fly during WW2 was the Junkers Ju 287 V1 *Versuchs 1*, or first prototype), a technology demonstrator for a planned jet bomber. It was fitted with swept-forward wings and no less than four Jumo 004B engines, which were also installed in the likes of the Messerschmitt Me 262 and Arado Ar 234 *Blitz*. The single prototype built first flew on 8th August 1944 and went on to make 17 test flights before the project was cancelled due to a lack of resources. A second prototype was constructed but never flew.[38] The Ju 287 V1 was 60 feet (18m) long with a wingspan of around 66 feet (20m). In test flights, it just managed to reach 350mph (550 km/h). However, this particular type was still two years away in the future.

In November 1942, the only German machines capable of 500 mph were examples of the diminutive rocket-powered Me 163A *Komet* used in unarmed trials at the *Luftwaffe's Erprobungsstelle* (experimental testing station) at Karlshagen, also known as Peenemünde-West, and the Heinkel He 280 V3, then undergoing testing at the company's factory located at Rostock-Marienehe. The latter could reach 500 mph but was plagued by engine fires and other problems, and the type was soon dropped in favour of the Me 262 jet fighter. Neither were flown outside Germany at that time. It is therefore impossible for Lever and his crew to have witnessed either a He 280 or Me 163A prototype in the skies over northern Italy.

The Germans only built two larger types than the Me 323 *Gigant* during WW2. The record holder in terms of wingspan was the single Junkers Ju 322 *Mammut* ("Mammoth"), built in 1941 to satisfy a requirement for tank-carrying *Luftwaffe* assault gliders. Its wings were 203 feet (61m) wide, but its fuselage was only half as long. The prototype proved difficult to tow off the ground due to its bulk and suffered from dangerous instability whilst being towed in the air. The

Ju 322 V1 was broken up for firewood in the summer of 1941, sharing this fate with 99 further airframes in various states of construction. The second type was the sole example of the Blohm und Voss Bv 238, a six-engined seaplane which broke the unofficial record for the heaviest aircraft ever flown when flight tests began in April 1944. The machine's wingspan measured 195 feet (59m), and its fuselage was 142 feet (43m) long. The single prototype built was damaged and partially sunk by USAAF P-51D Mustang fighters in late 1944 but was eventually salvaged. The Allies captured the airframe and then sank in deeper waters after the war was over. It is obvious that neither the Ju 322 nor the Bv 238 could have been candidates for the object that Lever and his crew saw over the Alps. The object they witnessed defies all attempts to identify it.

The report sent by RAF Syerston wound up in the hands of Air Vice Marshal Alec Coryton, Commanding Officer of No.5 Group, as the report was forwarded by him onto the main headquarters of Bomber Command together with a personal covering note, which read as follows:

"Herewith a copy of a report received from a crew of a Lancaster after a raid on Turin. The crew refuses to be shaken in their story in the face of the usual ridicule and banter."[39]

It is not known what was done about the report that was forwarded to RAF Bomber Command. If it had been mulled over in December 1942 and perhaps into 1943, then a working group may have been set up in order to investigate these sightings properly. Although there is no actual evidence of one being formed in that year by way of any available paperwork, there have been suggestions that such an organisation was actually established to look into the claim made by the No.61 Sqdn crew and others whose reports are yet to enter the public domain.

Henry Durrant, the author of *Le Livre noir des soucoupes volantes*, offered one suggestion as to what happened to this report and others like it at the time. The well-respected author John A. Keel

had also included a brief reference to this in his 1970 book *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse*. Both appeared to be quoting from *Flying Saucers - Here and Now!*, written by the celebrated American writer, broadcaster, and UFO commentator Frank Edwards, the book being published posthumously in 1967. Edwards had mentioned an investigative group that looked into reports of British wartime UFO sightings, which, if true, would probably have been one of the first, if not the first of its type in the world:

"As early as 1943, the English had set up a small organization to gather information on these objects. It was under the direction of Lieutenant General Massey, and it had been inspired to some extent by the reports of a spy who was in reality a double agent, working under the direction of the Mayor of Cologne. He had confirmed that the foo fighters were not German devices but that the Germans thought they were Allied ranging instruments, which of course the British knew that they were not."[40]

Edwards claimed he had learned from the British Air Ministry in 1966 that the "Massey Project" had been shelved in 1944. He also suggested that it might have been pure coincidence that the double agent who was responsible for providing intelligence regarding the objects was denounced and executed by the Germans in the spring of that year.[41] Although the formation of a secretive study group sounded plausible, the inclusion of a double agent made the claim hard to swallow. Verification of the story has proved difficult for researchers and so far, no-one has discovered anything else about the so-called "Massey Project" beyond what is included in *Flying Saucers - Here and Now!* It is more likely that the author was told a tall tale. Frank Edwards was an extremely influential American figure in the UFO subject and would have had plenty of people lining up to tell their stories to him, in the hope that they made it into the pages of his books. When I was much younger, just starting to learn about UFOs, I stumbled across the reference to the "Massey Project" and hoped it was true. Forty years later, I am content to dismiss it as a

fabrication, although further investigation was required to reach this conclusion.

Researchers have tried and failed to find a Lieutenant-General Massey in the British Army during WW2. There was an officer called Lieutenant-Colonel Patrick Massey, although during 1943 he was serving in Burma with the 10th Baluch Regiment. He died in February 2002 aged 88. It may appear strange that an army officer of Lieutenant-General rank would be placed in command of a small intelligence-gathering project regarding strange aerial objects, as this was within the scope of the RAF or British Air Ministry. However, in 1939, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, but more commonly referred to as MI6) established its own Air Intelligence Branch which was placed under the command of Group Captain F. W. Winterbotham, the organisation operating in addition to the RAF's own Intelligence Branch. Winterbotham would later achieve fame by writing the ground-breaking book *The Ultra Secret*, published in 1974, which provided details of how the British broke the German Engima code and then used the information they received from intercepted and decoded messages. Mention of a double agent operating in Köln therefore lends a tiny amount of credibility to the suggestion of SIS involvement, although the inclusion of spies almost turns the story into a script for a bad novel. It is something of a stretch to suggest that a British spy was being controlled by the mayor of a German city instead of the *Abwehr* (German military intelligence).

If the officer's name was misspelt by Edwards or the source of his information, then a candidate may appear in the shape of Lt.-Gen. Hugh Massy, commander of the North-West Expeditionary Force in the abortive Norwegian campaign of April 1940, although he remained based in London and directed operations from there. However, after commanding XI Corps (Home Forces) in East Anglia, Massy retired from active duty in 1943. He does not appear to have had any Intelligence background and therefore would have been an odd choice to head up such a research project.

The Air Ministry had its own organisations devoted to investigation of German weapons projects. The Royal Aircraft

Establishment, located at Farnborough in Hampshire, was one, as was the Air Intelligence Branch (not to be confused with the SIS section) which operated in support of the RAF. Therefore, at least three separate departments could have been the potential home of Lt.-Gen. Massey's investigative unit if it had existed in the first place. However, without further details, working out which one, if any of them, is virtually impossible, and neither Edwards, Keel nor Durrant shed any light on the subject. If such a research project had existed, its members would have surely included Professor R. V. Jones, Assistant Director of Intelligence (Science) at the Air Ministry, and also Henry Tizard, chair of the Aeronautical Research Committee, which had instigated the development of British radar in 1935. However, in his book *Most Secret War*, detailing the behind the scenes effort to defeat German bombing aids, radar and night-fighters, Jones omits any mention of a "Massey Project" or any similar organisation. He also stated that RAF bomber crews were expected to submit reports regarding encounters they had with German night-fighters, plus any other experiences that might shed light on enemy defences.[42] Most of these reports ultimately came to him.

When questioned directly in 1996 on whether the British Air Ministry had indeed investigated the "Foo Fighters" reported later in the war, Prof. Jones replied that they had not, and in any case, it would have been a matter for the RAF. However, the question could have been interpreted as only covering what the USAAF saw later in the war. "Foo Fighter" was a term that the Americans used almost exclusively, and only from November 1944 onwards. Jones was certainly privy to some of the reports concerning strange lights in the skies, as in *Most Secret War*, he refers to bomber crews who *"had reported single-engine night-fighters with yellow lights in their noses over Germany, at times when we knew that no single-engine night-fighters were flying."*[43] If a British investigation had occurred, one separate from the alleged "Massey Project", then its files may well have been buried so deep that they are unlikely ever to emerge into the public realm. RAF nicknames varied depending on who was

reporting the strange lights. Aircrew called them “The Thing”, “The Light”, or even “Balls of Fire”, whilst Air Intelligence referred to them under the catch-all description of “Phenomena”. Whilst Jones was aware that aircrews were seeing strange lights and possibly weird objects, he had no real idea of what they were, other than the likelihood that they were a new weapon that the Allies would eventually discover more details about once it was used more widely.

Cold water was also poured on the supposed existence of the “Massey Project” by Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard, who wrote a letter to FSR, which was published in June 1978. His final paragraph referenced the claims about Massey made in Keel’s *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse*:

“It claims that a general officer of the Army was appointed by the Air Ministry to fill an established vacancy in a UFO study project. This implies Treasury sanction; it suggests that in the middle of the War against Germany when we had our hands full and it was far from certain we could survive, the Air Ministry was concerned that a UFO menace existed: it most certainly was not. The letter names a general who is not listed in my earliest ‘Who’s Who’ of 1955. So, unless he died meanwhile, he did not exist in the British Army.”[44]

As the former Deputy Director of Intelligence at the Air Ministry, it is almost certain that Goddard would have heard of anyone taking up such a role. He was clearly pulling no punches with his letter, although there is still the remote possibility that a small research group may have fallen outside the Air Ministry’s remit. Even if a formal organisation had not been created along the lines of the

alleged “Massey Project”, both the air intelligence branches of the RAF and USAAF would have examined any reports of strange aerial objects very carefully, as they possibly represented some new form of German secret weapon. It was clear that W/O Lever and his crew had witnessed something odd over northern Italy and the higher echelons of RAF Bomber Command appeared to be finally taking reports of this type seriously.

Returning to the subject of possible enemy night-fighters flying around with searchlights or other lights fitted in their noses, Bomber Command’s Operational Research Section (ORS) had been compiling data as early as March 1942 on this very phenomenon. Early information gathered in the spring of that year did not come up with anything conclusive, although initial details led to an interesting statement:

“The only tendency shown, however, is that these lights occur most frequently among the unidentified aircraft. It seems likely that many of these aircraft would not have been seen but for their lights.”[45]

A table accompanying these statement recorded 77 sightings of aircraft with lights, of which 52 could not be identified at all. Another eleven were types which had not yet joined the night battle at that stage. Lights that were noticed following RAF bombers were described as being red, yellow, white or pale green. Some of the ones witnessed in previous months had been bright blue. Remarks were also made about how close some of these lights had approached:

“Following has usually lasted for about 5 minutes, but sometimes for as long as 30 to 40 minutes and has been at various distances from 100 to 1,000 yards.”[46]

It is strange that tail gunners were permitting unidentified aircraft to follow them so closely without opening fire. 100 yards from a bomber’s tail was well within effective firing range for a *Luftwaffe*

night-fighter, and unless its lights were exceptionally bright, it should have been possible to make out type of aircraft was carrying them. German aircraft did not carry airborne searchlights or other bright lights during combat, so whatever was going on was a complete mystery. It appeared from most reports that just the light had been witnessed. Given that gunners were constantly on the lookout for enemy night-fighters, it was almost certain that when they suddenly saw a bright light approaching from the rear, they automatically believed they were watching a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter closing in for the “kill”. In 1942, anything new or strange-looking would have been regarded as a potential secret weapon. New aircraft, tanks and guns had already been introduced since September 1939, so the possibility of more outlandish methods of waging war were never completely discounted.

The same section in April 1942’s ORS Report included the caveat that the majority of aircraft had been unidentified, and this trend continued into successive months. Of those given positive identification, several were fictitious types, their designations used by the Germans in a propaganda exercise to convince the British that they were using new high-performance aircraft.[47] The July ORS Report did however propose the possibility that one or more of these lights were acting as decoys for other aircraft without lights, which intended to attack from below.[48] It was a good suggestion, but this would have involved a degree of co-operation and timing between the enemy crews that was beyond the fledgling night-fighter force at that time. Flashing lights were also reported by aircrew, which was even more odd, given the amount of attention that would be drawn towards such items.

The reader may simply dismiss these headlights and nose lights as just enemy aircraft, ones that went unidentified. However, the gunners onboard the Polish Wellington shot at the light that approached their aircraft. There was no observable effect. If the light was attached to a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter, then it proved invulnerable to machine-gun fire. The light moved around to the side of their bomber and was fired on a second time without sustaining damage.

A *Luftwaffe* night-fighter would not have been able to withstand multiple strikes by two sets of turret-mounted machine guns, and at the close quarters described by the Polish pilot, a German aircraft type would have been almost certainly identified at that range. Whilst many of the unidentified lights may well have been fitted to enemy machines, it is also quite possible that some of the lights mentioned in the ORS report were further examples of the object witnessed in March 1942.

A further ORS report later that month dealt with more off phenomenon sighted over the *Reich* by bomber crews. Titled *"Note on Recent Enemy Pyrotechnic Activity over Germany"*, it described a recent investigation that had been carried out by the Flak Liaison Officer from No.5 Group, Bomber Command, together with staff from No.3 and No.5 Group, to *"determine the probable purpose of these devices. M.I.14(e) is also looking into the matter in other Groups and a further report will be issued later."* The first part of the report dealt with a type of object that had been sighted, nicknamed the "Chandelier Flare" by crews. According to the report, they were:

"…shot up from the ground, either by a rocket with damping to render its trail invisible or by some form of mortar. It is possible that they are projected by heavy flak guns but unlikely owing to the size of the resulting object."[49]

This was a description of an "invisible" rocket, which then appeared in the sky as a *"orange red ball of fire"*, one without any accompanying blast wave, so not a flak burst. The ball of fire was estimated at 50 to 60 feet in diameter, and after around ten seconds it "dripped" multi-coloured fragments. Although the report suggested they were some type of flare, the report conceded that they did not generate much light. In addition, if they were a new type of weapon, they were rather useless: *"The enemy seems to make no attempt to aim them at our bombers, in fact the reverse seems to be the case."*[50] In addition, RAF bomber crews had noted these "rockets" reaching heights of around 19,000 feet in some cases. This was

beyond the capabilities of any rockets that could have been in operational service with the *Luftwaffe flak* defences at that time. The various guided surface-to-air missile projects under development were still almost a couple of years away from initial construction, let alone testing or deployment, and none of these would ever see service.

It was also suggested that the "Chandelier Flares" might have been a form of visual deterrent, as Allied flak experts believed that they were not lethal, unless a bomber happened to fly into one by accident:

"These objects have been described by some stations as 'aerial minefields', but it is very misleading as it appears that they are certainly not mines, since (a) no aircraft is known to have sustained damage from them and (b) it is thought that the whole object of an aerial mine would be defeated if its position were indicated by such a luminous object."

Evidence that they might not have actually been German ground-launched flares was included in the same ORS report, given that there was a suggestion that they had been seen over Britain too:

"These flares have been seen both over this country and over enemy territory and therefore seems probable that they are always dropped from aircraft. They are a form of multiple flare, usually a minimum of 3 or 4 in number which give out a large amount of light and are probably designed to assist fighter attack. It is not known whether they are all fixed together on a cable supported by a parachute or whether each flare drifts down independently after being ejected from some form of container."[51]

There would have been no reason for *Luftwaffe* night-fighters or bombers to drop flares over Britain unless they were used to light up a target after bombs were dropped on it, in order to take photographs used in damage assessment. If anything, they would

have drawn attention to their presence for RAF night-fighters. Some German twin-engined Junkers Ju 88Cs were converted from bombers to night intruders and sent over southern England in 1941 but as far as I am aware, their crews did not employ flares in this manner. They were too busy looking for targets of opportunity to shoot down, much like the USAAF P-61 Black Widow crews would do in late 1944 and early 1945 when they encountered the “Foo Fighters”. “Fighter flares” were certainly employed by the German night-fighter force later in the war, but such devices usually detonated well below the bomber stream, often just above a cloud layer in order to silhouette the aircraft themselves. Other night-fighter crews loitering well above the stream therefore obtained a much clearer view of their targets. Were these “Chandelier Flares” actually sightings of “Foo Fighters”? It is impossible to tell.

A possible, though somewhat unlikely candidate came in the form of the *Scheinsignalrakete 44*, officially known as the *15cm Raketen-Scheinsignal-Geschoss* (15cm R-SgGs, or “False Missile Signal Projectile”), a signal rocket that could carry parachute marker flares to confuse Allied bomber crews by imitating their own targeting flares. It was the only operational German ground-launched rocket that could reach anywhere near the altitudes flown by the RAF night bombers whose missions are listed above. These two metre-long signal rockets only possessed a maximum operating altitude of 8,000 feet (2438m).[52] The 15cm R-SgGs also had an incredibly small amount of solid fuel fitted into its combustion chamber, so burning time was very short, only around two seconds following ignition.[53] This was just sufficient to reach its maximum altitude. The likelihood of such a rocket being identified as a luminous disc or a 200 foot long torpedo by bomber crews would have been incredibly low. According to Allied aircrew who reported seeing these rockets, they looked to be “home-made”.[54] They were also painted dark green, and after the fuel was exhausted, there was little or no smoke trail. This would have also led to their near-invisibility during the higher stages of flight. The rockets were also launched at an angle of 80°, so a horizontal flight profile for any length of time, as described

by some of the RAF airmen in their witness accounts, would have been all but impossible. In addition, once deployed, the flares they carried did not looked like rockets. Instead, they would have appeared static, rather than resembling a fast-moving missile or projectile. Whilst I cannot rule out the *Scheinsignalrakete 44* completely as the cause of some cases, it seems difficult to imagine that such devices were frequently reported as the "rockets" mentioned by the Allied aircrews, especially by those operating at much higher altitudes. The 15cm R-SgGs was however deployed from 1942 onwards.[55]

Mysterious lights that either approached or followed RAF bombers were clearly intriguing Air Intelligence and the *flak* experts. The ORS report for September 1942 included mention of a Wellington being followed by orange lights *"most of the way from Le Treport to Saarbrucken, a distance of roughly 250 miles."* The crew believed that relays of up to five Ju 88s were responsible, although it is hard to understand why none of them fired at the bomber. The report suggested that this strange behaviour may have been part of a training exercise for new night-fighter crews, although one would assume that pupils would not be allowed to close in on the enemy without their aircraft being armed in some way at least. Tales of mysterious machines carrying lights would pop up again later in the war, and these stories are told in the following chapter.

October 1942 saw no reports of mysterious lights being fitted to aircraft attacking the bombers. Other lights were witnessed by aircrews, but they never came close enough to be identified properly. It was estimated that around 70-80% of everything seen approaching a bomber from behind was actually a night-fighter. The remainder were simply identified as "lights".[56] R. V. Jones was correct: *Luftwaffe* night-fighters were never equipped with nose-mounted airborne searchlights or fitted elsewhere on their airframes. If experiments with such systems had been conducted, the Germans would have no doubt encountered the same problems that the RAF faced during their Turbinlite trials. Turbinlite was a powerful airborne searchlight fitted to a twin-engined Douglas Havoc, the night-fighter

version of the Boston tactical bomber. Flying in company with a Hawker Hurricane fighter also operating in the night-fighter role, the idea was for the Havoc to illuminate an enemy aircraft, allowing the accompanying fighter pilot to shoot it down. The Havoc was marked with white stripes which in theory would be used by the Hurricane pilot for close formation flying purposes, although in practice it was difficult for both aircraft to fly together safely and effectively. When the combination was put into service, the searchlight blinded both the Havoc and Hurricane pilots, disorientating them, which posed a danger to their aircraft. The ground control intercept radar operators were not keen on the project either, so the concept was soon abandoned.

By the end of October 1942, the RAF had all but given up trying to work out why aircrew were reporting seeing these mysterious lights. An analysis of their findings was included in an ORS report, titled *"Interceptions by aircraft carrying lights".* This has been reproduced in full here:

"No satisfactory theory has yet been advanced as to the function of many of the lights carried by some enemy fighters, particularly these described as headlights. These are usually white or orange, though red or even bright blue are sometimes seen. While the percentage of interceptions effected by aircraft carrying lights have varied from month to month these variations show no significant tendency, though they may possibly be said to have deceased in the past few months. The percentage given for the whole period can probably be taken as fairly representative.

Whatever the use of the lights may be, experience has shown that these aircraft do not frequently attack and there is no evidence that they constitute any particular danger. On the contrary, since they can be seen more readily they are probably more easily evaded. Cases in which an aircraft with lights is clearly acting as a decoy is rare.

An attempt made over several months to associate the use of lights with any particular type of enemy fighter has yielded no result, since most of the fighters concerned have not been identified.

The many curious cases in which a fighter with lights follows the bomber, out of firing range for long distances without attempting to attack have not yet received any satisfactory explanation."

A table accompanied this section of the report, detailing 659 cases where presumed aircraft with lights had been witnessed by RAF aircrew between August 1941 and October 1942. Of these, only around 11% had involved something described as an attack. In the remainder of cases, 26% of lights approached and the majority were noted following at a distance. If these were enemy night-fighters, nearly 90% were totally ineffective as they had not made any attack whatsoever.[57] Staying out of range of a tail gunner's machine guns sounded sensible for a shadowing crew, but at a distance of over 1,000 yards away and at night, a gunner may have only been able to see a light and nothing else, never mind identify what type of aircraft might have been carrying it. Histories of German night-fighter pilots and the force in general do not carry accounts of missions where bombers were simply followed for mile upon mile without the prospect of attacking. This was a strange phenomenon, one which is still not explained today, nearly eighty years on. Further reports of aircraft fitted with bright lights would appear in the official records as the war went on.

Several books and websites include a brief mention of B. C. Lumsden's sighting of two amber or orange-coloured lights which he encountered one evening over the mouth of the River Somme on an unspecified date in December 1942. In November 1955, Lumsden spoke to a reporter for the New Zealand newspaper *Evening Post*, who wrote an article entitled *"Wartime Experiences"* which included details of the incident.[58] The pilot first reported seeing the lights when he was flying his Hurricane fighter at an altitude of 7,000 feet. He watched the lights slowly ascend until they drew level with him, then increased in both size and brilliance. Lumsden's article was published in at least two different newspapers. He appeared to be responding to the news of a National Air Corporation Douglas DC-3 airliner crew, who reported a UFO over New Zealand in late October

or early November 1955. The relevant parts of both articles are reproduced here in full, starting with the *Evening Post's* report :

"*A wartime experience similar to that of the NAC crew was described today by Mr B. C. Lumsden, of Lower Hutt, who was flying a Hurricane on intruder operations over France in December 1942, when he sighted two lights which followed him for about 15 minutes. Mr Lumsden took off from England at 7 o'clock at night and landed about an hour and a half later. He flew to the French coast and pinpointed himself over the mouth of the Somme. He was flying at 7000 feet when he saw two dim amber or orange coloured lights climbing steadily side by side, with one slightly above the other. At first he thought it was tracer flak but stopped thinking that because of the slowness with which the lights climbed."*

The article in the *Christchurch Star-Sun* newspaper carried further details:

"He turned a full circle to starboard, and again saw the lights to the north-east, behind him on his left, but rather larger and brighter. They were now on a level with him at 7000ft, and no longer climbing. He turned sharply to port and made a complete orbit – and found that the lights were keeping behind him on the turn. He jettisoned his long-range [fuel] *tanks to obtain more manoeuvrability and turned tightly to port, only to find that the lights still stayed behind. He then did diving turns out to sea and flattened out at 4000ft, heading north-north-east. The lights followed his general direction, always astern, and descended to about 1000ft below him, soon climbing again when he remained on a level course.*

The Hurricane continued to fly on a course of 320deg at an indicated speed of 260 mph and gradually drew away from the lights, which appeared to continue to follow. When about five to ten minutes from the English coast, which he crossed at Hastings, he lost sight of them. The lights had been visible altogether for 15min. They appeared to remain at an even distance from one another, except for one brief period when they drew closer together. They varied slightly

in relative height from time to time, but the starboard one was always slightly lower than the other. Had they been wingtip lights, the aircraft carrying them would not have been flying starboard wing down."[59]

According to the newspaper, intelligence officers drafted a report about the incident, which was circulated around various RAF commands, earning the strange apparitions the nickname "Lumsden's Lights". When the reporter asked the former pilot what his colleagues' reactions were once they heard about his encounter, he made light of the situation during the war:

"The usual – the sort of reactions they give to people who say they spotted a flying saucer. The implication is – 'give up drinking, old man, it isn't doing you any good'."[60]

However, this was not the end of the story. A fellow pilot, someone who doubted Lumsden's account, decided to fly over the exact same area the following night, determined to lay the matter to rest. According to the New Zealander, this colleague returned shaken and rather thoughtful:

"His report was promptly dubbed 'Lumsden's Lights II'. His story was that he had been followed closely by a green light, which kept squarely behind him, no matter what he did. Finally, in cloud, he managed to get away from it. He spent no further time in searching."[61]

Mentions of B. C. Lumsden in books and websites fail to provide further details about the pilot, the unit he belonged to or the date of the encounter over northern France. Finding these details proved to be more challenging, but not impossible, especially as the UFO report from 1955 he was apparently responding to had taken place in New Zealand. Pilot Officer Byron Court Lumsden was also a New Zealander, and in the autumn of 1942 he was serving with No.3 Sqdn at Hunsdon airfield in Hertfordshire. On 12th September 1942

he was posted to the unit's detached Night Flight based at Manston in Kent, which was possibly also known as "B" Flight. He was promoted from Temporary Flight Sergeant to Pilot Officer five days later. The Manston detachment flew Hawker Hurricane Mk.IIC single-seat fighters in the solo night intruder role, carrying out harassment missions against targets of opportunity in northern France and Belgium, plus occasional night-fighter sorties in concert with twin-engined Douglas Havoc bombers fitted with Turbinlite searchlights. I was unable to locate the mission records for the Night Flight detachment, as they are not part of the unit's ORB for December 1942, but P/O Lumsden would have been flying missions over northern France during this timeframe. Unfortunately, the lack of post-sortie briefing notes means that the exact date of the incident cannot be verified. Once again, there is only the pilot's testimony to go on.

The complete lack of aggressive behaviour by whatever was generating the amber lights would tend to suggest it was not a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter or experimental anti-aircraft weapon, although obviously this is not conclusive proof. The pilot did not believe it was an aircraft due to it flying one wing down, and his assumption has merit. There would be no reason for an enemy machine to fly in such a manner, especially over a long period of time. However, without further details, the case remains unexplained. Byron Lumsden was promoted to the rank of Flight Lieutenant in December 1944 and survived the war. He died in his native New Zealand in January 2008.[62]

Whilst the newspaper reports and squadron records were all I could find through my own research, more information on this case was obtained via the former *Jane's Defence Weekly* journalist and author of *The Hunt For Zero Point*, Nick Cook. His 2005 documentary *UFOs: The Secret Evidence* also included a short segment about the "Foo Fighters" and Lumsden's incident in particular. Nick showed a document purporting to be the pilot's account of the sighting, taken from the archives. It read as follows:

"We were cruising at 7,000 feet when we discovered we had company. An orange-coloured light off the port wing. At first I thought it was tracer flak. But discounted this when I saw how slowly and controlled it was moving. It seemed to be playing with Red Two, diving around the fuselage. Suddenly turned to the starboard and headed straight for us. I found it hard to make other members of the squadron believe me. But the following night, one of the squadron flight commanders had a similar experience with a green light."[63]

The report as shown on camera did not look correct, as it seemed to have been re-typed on a blank sheet of paper for clarity and then "distressed" to make it look authentic. Headed *"Foo Fighter, B. C. Lumsden Account"*, it was shown in conjunction with a dramatic reconstruction, with a strange orange ball of light flying around a flight of Mosquito fighter-bombers, not Hurricanes. From both the squadron records and the post-war articles in the New Zealand press, it was clear that Lumsden was a Hurricane pilot, and flying solo that night. There was no "Red Two". In addition, the term "Foo Fighter" was not used in December 1942 by either the British or the Americans. A sighting report submitted by the pilot would not have included this phrase. Nick Cook spoke to me in August 2021 about these discrepancies. As Lumsden's account did not feature in his book *The Hunt For Zero Point*, he believed that the documentary's production team had come up with the document and the dramatic reconstruction.[64] It is likely that the report itself was drafted for the programme, loosely based on what actual information, i.e. the newspaper reports, was available.

Although intended for the US Army Air Force's Eighth Air Force in Britain, I have included relevant snippets from their *Weekly Air Intelligence Digests* in this chapter as they include details of what the RAF were encountering over Germany from mid-1942 onwards. *Weekly Air Intelligence Digest Vol.1 No.6* for the week ending 26th December 1942 was a goldmine of information regarding strange lights. The section titled *Confidential: Flak Phenomena* included details of several new types of flares thought to be employed by the

Germans, including the track-indicating or “fighter flares” used by the *Luftwaffe* to highlight the direction of RAF bombers. According to the report, they demonstrated the following:

“[They are] lit on the ground or projected up to moderate heights. The phenomenon frequently described as ‘balls of fire’ probably comes within this category; they burn an orange color for about half a minute and give off usually similar colored fragments either during the period of burning, or when finally bursting.”[65]

The same report also suggested that tracer bullets fired at some distance from the observing aircraft might have been mistaken for these *“balls of fire.”* However, the most curious part of the *Flak Phenomenon* article could be found under the sub-section on *“meteor projectiles”.* The description of the device’s behaviour was bizarre to say the least:

“This phenomenon was reported by a number of aircrews in the approximate area Aachen-Verviers – 12 miles SW of Spa-Aachen on the night of 11-12 August 1942. Although it has only once been reported since and should therefore strictly be classified as an isolated ‘freak’, the interest it aroused warrants the inclusion of a description of its behavior.”

A bright white light rose from the ground to 8,000 feet where it flew approximately level for about two minutes; a few crews reported that it appeared to zigzag along the ground before taking off in a climbing turn. Brilliant white periodic bursts occurred which may have caused a change of course; some crews thought that it subdivided when the bursts took place. Other crews thought that it flew on a circular course, the radius of which was about one mile. Burning pieces were shed from it like a meteor. The color eventually faded to orange and the object was last seen heading toward the ground where some crews thought that it burst on impact. The display lasted about five minutes.”

Whilst a *Scheinsignalrakete* could have reached 8,000 feet, it would not have been able to fly horizontally for several minutes. Despite the level of detail in the report, Air Intelligence staff clearly felt that they still did not have enough information to work with, although some guesses were made:

"Owing to the scarcity of information about this phenomenon, which may well have been in the nature of an experiment, it is difficult to submit an explanation. It is possibly a miniature aircraft structure carrying a number of rockets and an explosive charge. Its changes of course are probably predetermined, radio control being thought improbable owing to the cost of production, the small chance of directing such a projectile on to a bomber, and the fact that it would be virtually impossible to bring it in to land intact by night."[66]

This description of a "meteor", one that rose from the ground, matched the description of the *flak* rockets that would be designed in late 1943. Mention of a "miniature aircraft" with rocket boosters suggested something similar to the Messerschmitt Enzian, a surface-to-air missile project developed in 1943 but not launched until the following year. Since the Germans did not possess anything remotely similar in August 1942, it is extremely difficult to work out what this mysterious object could have been. Air Intelligence were however starting to report such phenomenon, presumably with a view to gathering more information. The RAF would encounter mysterious airborne "rockets" over the Balkans in 1944 and we will look at these case, plus the possible causes at that time in Chapter 2. It is also worth bearing in mind that the Aachen area would end up being something of a hot-spot for "Foo Fighter" activity at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 for American night-fighter and intruder crews.

1943

The new year arrived, and yet bomber crews continued to report seeing suspected enemy aircraft with lights fitted in their noses. On the evening of 5th March 1943, one of No.77 Sqdn's four-engined Handley Page Halifax Mk.II bombers was engaged in a mine-laying sortie in the channel between the islands of Schiermonnikoog and Englesmanplaat off the north coast of Holland. Sgt. G. Watson was flying DT632/KN-B about five miles south of Schiermonnikoog when his Halifax was followed by a strange object:

"Believed followed, 1,500 yards, port beam, at 10,000 feet, by unidentified aircraft burning yellowish orange nose light. Unidentified aircraft maintaining same relative position to 53.45 N 06.14½ E, where one minute before releasing mines, aircraft was hit by flak."[67]

It is impossible to know whether an aircraft was actually sighted in the glare of the "yellowish orange" light, or whether this was an assumption on the part of the crew, however no aggressive action was taken which appears strange in itself. The concept of a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter giving the position of RAF bombers to anti-aircraft units on the ground is somewhat preposterous, as the German night-fighter could also have been hit by *flak* shell bursts. What was flying around northern Holland and following RAF bombers in the dark in early March 1943?

Misidentification was certainly an issue and does not help analysis of what was occurring seventy-eight years ago. As an example of this, which is not related to the UFO subject but does provide evidence of how false reporting bedevils aircraft historians in addition to researchers of strange objects, here is a description of an encounter that involved another No.77 Sqdn crew over Europe a week later. Halifax DT796/KN-D, flown by Sgt. L. E. Lahey, encountered two single-engined *Luftwaffe* fighters whilst returning from a raid on Essen. *"A Me 109, and later a Heinkel 113, was sighted..."*[68] There was no such aircraft as the He 113. The Germans used photos of a row of Heinkel He 100 fighters and used these for propaganda purposes as the fictitious "He 113",

perpetuating this myth for a considerable period of time. Even though one of the prototypes had broken the absolute world speed record in March 1939, the He 100 single-seater was never used by the *Luftwaffe* and only ever served in Heinkel's factory-defence unit at the Marienehe works airfield during 1939 and early 1940, being flown by company test pilots.[69] However, this did not stop RAF fighter and bomber pilots from reporting encounters (and even claims of shooting down) He 113s during 1941 and 1942, by which time most, if not all, of the airframes constructed had been scrapped. Fictitious aircraft were therefore being reported at times by Allied aircrews.

More sightings of strange flying objects that were given astronomical-type labels appeared in official reports during March 1943. Buried away at the end of a Consolidated Flak Liaison Officer Report for that month was a paragraph simply titled "Phenomena", most of which was taken up with more information about the so-called "Scarecrow" flares. However, there was also this intriguing line*: "Orange 'comet-like' objects were also seen in the area of Zwolle, apparently fired in pairs and bursting at considerable heights."* The suggestion here was that these "comets", possibly objects that were similar to the mysterious "meteors" witnessed in August 1942, were some sort of new German *flak* weapon.[70]

The NAC crew's UFO sighting in 1955 also prompted another former wartime fighter pilot to write a letter to New Zealand's Minister of Civil Aviation. In his correspondence of 4th November 1955, the writer (whose name was removed from public copies) stated that he had served with No.73 Sqdn in North Africa during WW2. He provided details of an incident in either March or April 1943 near Monastir in Tunisia, which he claimed might have been of interest to personnel carrying out an investigation into the NAC crew's sighting. According to the writer, several pilots from his squadron had reported being followed by lights prior to his own encounter. One of these was F/Lt. Wells, who we will learn more about regarding a subsequent incident, after his promotion to Squadron Leader. The letter writer's account of what occurred in the spring of 1943 is given in full here.

"As I remember it, I had set off at night from my base for enemy territory. I crossed the battle line and observed well ahead of me and to port a faint glow of light, similar to that given off by flares for which at first I mistook it. The course I was flying should have taken me very close to the starboard of the light but contrary to expectations, the distance between the light and myself was rapidly decreasing with an increasing intensity of light. Finally, the light drew alongside my port wing, and at a distance of about 50 to 100 yards took up a course and speed identical to my own.

I found that altering course, height or speed, the light did likewise, though if the change were sudden there would be a short time lag before it caught up. By turning suddenly and steeply, I was able to chase the light around in a circle until I could aim my four 20mm cannons at it. This I did several times until my ammunition was exhausted, but each time I observed, no apparent change in the behaviour of the light.

In due time I set course for base without completing my original mission, and the light continued to move with me. As I neared the battle front, I noted that the light began to lag behind and become dimmer. Having crossed the battle line I again turned back into enemy territory and noted that the light was in the position and the condition that I'd originally observed it. The light burned a strong, steady orange red glow and when alongside the aircraft, illuminated quite brightly the whole plane. I could observe nothing to which the light was attached, nor could I determine what created it. During the time that the light was with me, I received no attention from anti-aircraft guns. One other New Zealander was with 73 Squadron at the time and could verify these remarks."[71]

The writer added that several of his former colleagues had reported similar encounters, and although he believed there could have been an official explanation for such events, he did not know what that was. The writer received a reply on 10th November 1955 from Tom Shand, New Zealand's Minister in Charge of Civil Aviation, who

expressed the notion that *“no doubt there are many phenomenon for which we have not yet found an explanation.”*[72] Given that the author’s name had been removed from the official records, I attempted to work out who the pilot was by searching the ORBs for No.73 Sqdn during the spring of 1943. No.73 Sqdn’s Hurricanes had been transferred overseas in November 1940, seeing action in North Africa until the German capitulation in Tunisia in May 1943, flying night intruder sorties as well as nocturnal air defence patrols. Patrols over the Monastir area commenced in March and the squadron moved there with their Hurricane Mk.IICs in April 1943 as the Germans retreated towards Tunis. However, both the summary and record of events files for March, April and May 1943 do not include any details of an encounter such as the one told in the letter. This, of course, was to be expected and does not mean that the incident never occurred, as ORBs for RAF fighter squadrons at this time recorded only brief details of missions. I have a good idea who this unnamed No.73 Sqdn pilot was, but as I have been unable to contact his family in New Zealand to try and confirm this, I am not listing his name here. This pilot did, however, pass away more than 35 years ago.

Scanning No.77 Sqdn’s ORB for May 1943, there are a number of other instances that could, with some imagination, be included in a list of “out of the ordinary” sightings. For instance, on the evening of 12/13th May, the crew of Halifax Mk.II JD110/KN-P witnessed a strange aircraft fly alongside them whilst they were en route to Duisburg. The aircraft was *“seen approaching on a parallel course, [and] identified as a Halifax type. Aircraft was painted jet black, with no roundels.”* As if to compound the mystery, the aircraft slipped closer to the track of the No.77 Sqdn bomber but was estimated to be flying 25 mph faster. *“No exhaust flames were visible, and no lights were showing. Aircraft had no front or mid-upper turrets fitted.”* An unidentifiable aircraft, one which resembled the crew’s own bomber, but was apparently devoid of markings or gun turrets, was now flying parallel to them but coming closer. This aroused the suspicions of the Halifax’s pilot, F/O Fitzgerald. *“*[He] *turned into and*

under the nose of the believed enemy aircraft, which immediately straightened out as if to bring rear guns to bear." Fitzgerald turned his bomber again, and the mysterious aircraft banked away to port and disappeared towards the coast.[73]

Rumours of the Germans using captured RAF and American bombers to infiltrate aircraft formations and then attack unsuspecting crews had been circulating for some time when this report was made in May 1943. It is true that the *Luftwaffe* did have a number of intact enemy machines that had either been captured or repaired following crashes that did not inflict much damage. These were flown by the *Zirkus Rosarius*, a test squadron established to evaluate Allied aircraft. Some of its machines were later operated by *Kampfgeschwader* 200 (KG 200, or "Bomber Wing 200"), a specialist and also highly secretive *Luftwaffe* unit which carried out a wide range of missions from agent dropping to training pilots for operations with the manned version of the Fieseler Fi 103 (V-1) flying bomb. The second *Staffel* ("squadron") of the unit's first *Gruppe*, 2./KG 200, had several USAAF Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress and Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers as part of its varied complement of types. Some of these had been evaluated by the *Zirkus Rosarius* and were painted in *Luftwaffe* markings with bright yellow tails for identification purposes, although others retained their original American colours and codes for operations behind the lines on agent dropping duties. However, KG 200 did not operate any Halifax bombers nor did the Nazis actually capture one either intact or in a repairable state, although pictures of Wellington Mk.IC L7842 painted in *Luftwaffe* markings do exist. However, no former pilots or crew members belonging to KG200 or from other units have ever come forward to suggest that they tried to infiltrate RAF bomber formations in 1943 or afterwards using unmarked aircraft. This is another mystery, one to add to all of the others that we have so far encountered.

The RAF did not operate aircraft painted totally black or completely unmarked. Black paint known as "Special Night" was applied to aircraft under-surfaces, upper surfaces being finished

using a camouflage effect of Dark Earth and Dark Green. Markings, including large fuselage and wing roundels, plus large identification code letters painted on the rear fuselage, were visible from some distance. A machine that flew close enough to identify in terms of its type would have had easily identifiable markings on its fuselage. Some early *Luftwaffe* night-fighters did wear all-black colour schemes although they also sported prominent fuselage codes that identified their *Geschwaderen* ("wings") and *Staffeln* ("squadrons") plus the individual aircraft in them. A large black and white *Balkankreuz* (the cross identified with German aircraft and vehicles in WW2) was painted on the fuselage sides, plus the upper and lower outer wing sections. By 1943, however, the *Nachtjagd* ("night-fighting force") were flying aircraft finished in light grey overall with dark grey splotches in a "stipple" effect, the latter usually extending over the upper wings, tailplane and halfway down the fuselage sides. Black paint, if still used, was then only applied to the aircraft undersides. Markings were always important, if not just to avoid the possibility of "friendly fire". However, as the war went on into 1944, *Luftwaffe* markings became smaller and more "low viz". However, there were no German machines that could easily pass for an RAF Halifax.

Air Intelligence was aware that the *Luftwaffe* was flying captured Allied aircraft, even if it was unclear whether this involved carrying out combat operations. However, the Americans certainly appeared to believe so, as a page from the Eighth Air Force's Weekly Air Intelligence Digest dated 1st May 1943 was titled *"Captured British Planes Used Against RAF".* There was mention of a potentially enemy-operated Wellington bomber that tailed and then opened fire on an RAF Halifax on the night of 14/15th April 1943. A Wellington was also said to have acted in concert with a single-engined fighter to approach and attack an RAF bomber.[74] The following week's *Digest* carried reports of captured B-17 Flying Fortresses and Spitfires noted on recent raids. However, the most disturbing incident mentioned concerned a Halifax that approached another during the raid on Duisburg on 26/27th April 1943, coming as close as 200

yards before opening fire. No damage was sustained by the RAF aircraft, however. A Lancaster was also fired upon by a Wellington. [75] It is possible that nervous gunners opened up at what they suspected were enemy night-fighters and these were unfortunately cases of “friendly fire”. Reports of strange B-17 Flying Fortresses, seemingly stragglers which were joining other combat “boxes”, were also included in the intelligence bulletins.[76] Tales of American B-17s with markings that were described as “not quite right” approaching daylight bomber formations persist to this day. Such rumours persisted throughout the rest of the war. Whilst such stories are not evidence of mysterious objects or “Foo Fighters”, they demonstrate that aircrews were always on the lookout for suspicious activity or out of the ordinary objects. They usually only reported seeing strange lights or objects if they were unusual.

Of course, it would have taken some nerve for the German pilot of a black, unmarked Halifax with no obvious weaponry fitted, to appear in the skies near Duisburg and sidle up towards an RAF bomber. If this was an enemy aircraft as suspected, why did its pilot not manoeuvre into a firing position and order his gunners to open fire on F/O Fitzgerald’s bomber? Unidentifiable machines that almost resembled existing aircraft types but which were observed flying in conditions beyond the limits of safety have been part of the UFO legend for years. Mystery airships appeared in the United States and Canada during the last decade of the 19th Century, and then in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand in 1909. Moving on into the mid-1930s, Scandinavia found itself at the epicentre of a wave of “Ghost Flyer” sightings, unidentified aircraft which were largely operating at night, often at low level and usually in weather that would have grounded all but the most reckless of aircrew. The explanation for the incident which took place near Duisburg and mentioned in the No.77 Sqdn records will almost certainly never been known. Despite not being as extraordinary as a long cylindrical object seen over the Alps, the sighting of a strange aircraft over Germany in May 1943 can be viewed as just another part of the overall mystery unfolding at the time.

Flak Liaison Officers assigned to each of Bomber Command's Groups operating over Occupied Europe often flew on missions to assess enemy *flak* developments. The FLO attached to No.4 Group, Major T. Southgate, bemoaned his own lack of sightings of strange phenomenon when he flew to Bochum on the night of 13/14th May 1943 in a Wellington Mk.X:

"None of the spectacular new kinds of flak or any of the phenomena so often reported were seen on this operation. From this aspect the trip was rather disappointing as it was hoped to be able to form an opinion from first-hand knowledge concerning incidents of which the evidence at hand is somewhat conflicting and vague."[77]

Whilst Southgate may have doubted the veracity of the sightings being reported by RAF crews in late 1942 and early 1943, they continued to be cited in official reports. The official Consolidated Flak Liaison Officer's Report covering the period 3rd-14th May 1943 devoted half a page to the "Phenomena" reported during the raid on Dortmund on the night of the 23rd/24th. Titled "British Secret: US Confidential", it is repeated in full here:

"On 12/13 May one aircrew reported that when flying at 20,000 feet just after leaving Duisburg, they saw a "meteor" travelling from north of the target in a southerly direction at about 16,000 feet. The object was reddish-orange in colour and three times during the observation it was said to have emitted a burst giving off a green star. It disappeared from view when it had lost height to about 12,000 feet.

On 13/14 May, during the operation against Pilsen, the crew of an aircraft flying at 18,000 feet a few miles SE of Meppel observed a similar phenomenon travelling from west to east behind and 2,000 feet below the aircraft, and rapidly overtaking it. It was described as giving off a sequence of sparks and as having a definite tail leaving a trail of sparks; it was seen to travel about ten miles before falling to the ground, where it burnt out after a minute. The crew who made this report said they had seen similar phenomenon on previous

occasions in approximately the same area, and also in the neighbourhood of Kiel.

These descriptions bear a strong resemblance to the 'meteor' projectile reported by a number of aircrews in the area Aachen-Verviers – 12 miles SW of Spa-Aachen on 11/12 Aug 1942 and subsequently only once reported again. It was thought at the time to have been in the nature of an experiment, but there is still no information to suggest whether it is intended primarily as a deterrent device or whether the enemy considers it may have some lethal value, perhaps against concentrations of aircraft."[78]

In order to try and find official confirmation via the unit records, I commenced a trawl through the ORBs of twenty-five different RAF bomber squadrons for May 1943, hoping to find reports of the "rockets" mentioned in the Flak Liaison Officer's report quoted above. However, whilst there was no specific sighting of a "rocket" in any of them for the Dortmund raid, lights were seen which, if viewed from a different perspective, possibly could have been the source of the reports. The crew of No. 77 Sqdn Halifax Mk.II JB781/KN-O reported seeing two "flares", *"1 yellow and 1 red, which are believed to have been decoys, as they were much brighter and hung like balls of fire in the sky."*[79] Other suspected decoy lights were witnessed well away from the target area by three other crews, one in a 156 Sqdn Lancaster and the others in a pair of 196 Sqdn Wellingtons. However, given that the Polish Wellington crew's sighting in March 1942 never made it into the 301 Sqdn mission logs, it is likely that the "rocket" sightings witnessed on the Dortmund raid were omitted from the official logs, as clearly they did exist, just not in the unit ORBs. Of course, it could be that I failed to find the unit whose crew experienced the "rockets".

Allied Air Intelligence seemed content to pass on the details of potential ground-launched *flak* rockets in their weekly *Digest* bulletins. *Vol.2 No.19* carried information from a captured *Luftwaffe flak* officer, who provided interrogators with various details of anti-aircraft tactics, weaponry and deployments. A sub-section entitled

“Rocket projectiles” gave details about weapons which the Germans were possibly experimenting with:

“The projectile was of the real rocket type and was for AA purposes. He did not know the size of the projectiles, which he thought might be a development of the Russian ‘Stalin Organs’, 7.5 cm, many of which the Germans captured, and copies (7.5 cm and 15 cm).”

Given that this was only based on the words of one *Luftwaffe* officer, a further comment was deemed necessary as a warning:

“We have no documentary evidence that the Germans use AA rocket weapons. They are known, however, to have captured Russian AA rocket projectors. Further, the evidence of aircrews of phenomena observed over German territory, suggests that the Germans are experimenting with AA rockets of various types. They have several land service rocket weapons, and the introduction of AA rockets seems a likely and logical development.”[80]

The Germans did have *Nebelwerfer* rocket artillery brigades, using five- or six-chambered rocket launchers built in three different versions that fired progressively larger projectiles. The smallest was the 150mm launcher, but there was also a 210mm and a much larger 300mm version. A few had been captured by the Allies in North Africa, but it was not clear whether a *flak* version had been developed. Stocks of captured Soviet truck-mounted *Katyusha* 82mm rocket launchers were also used against their former owners, and the Germans even built a version of their own as they were much simpler and cheaper to construct. As for anti-aircraft versions of the *Nebelwerfer*, such a weapon did exist, but a description of that and other possible devices will appear later. However, they were not used at night.

Three nights later, another RAF crew witnessed a similar object to that reported by W/O Lever. This case seems to have first appeared at length in Timothy Good’s book *Need to Know: UFOs, the Military*

and Intelligence, published in 2006. However, it is based on details passed to the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA), some of which appeared in *UFO Magazine* in 2003. Details of the case were printed in the April 2003 edition of *New BUFORA Journal* but had originally been published in Vol.6 No.3 of the "old" *BUFORA Journal* back in 1977. The case is now reasonably well known, having been reproduced in numerous other books and websites. It was even featured on *The Micah Hanks Program* in late 2020.[81]
On the night of 26/27th May 1943, Sgt. Gordon N. Cockcroft, a pilot from No.6 (Pilot) Advanced Flight Unit at RAF Little Rissington, Gloucestershire, was seconded to No.77 Sqdn at RAF Elvington, North Yorkshire. He took part in a raid against the *Krupp Werke* at Essen, dropping incendiary bombs on the target which had been previously marked by flares. The first wave had already bombed the target and by the time Cockcroft's aircraft, flown by Sgt. Ray Smith, Royal Canadian Air Force, reached the scene, the area below them was well alight. Cockcroft himself took up the story:

"It was in the two to three minutes before our final run-in when we were at approximately 18,700 feet when we saw in front, but slightly to port and about the same height, a long, cylindrical object, silvery gold colour, very sharply defined, hanging in the sky at an angle of about 45 degrees. There were, evenly spaced along the length of the object, a number of portholes. I am not quite certain after all this time whether or not there was a second row beneath them (or of their number)."[82]

According to Mack Maloney in *UFOs in Wartime*, the Halifax's pilot, Sgt. Ray Smith, a Royal Canadian Air Force officer, was the first of the crew of the bomber to spot the mysterious flying cylinder:

"Smith called out to his crew, and five of them spotted the object… The astonished crewmembers watched the object for almost a minute before it abruptly sped away. Climbing at an impossibly high

speed of 4,000 miles per hour, it disappeared into the stars overhead."

This rapid method of departure, similar to the Wellington crew's sighting fourteen months earlier, would become a common feature of the American "Foo Fighter" reports over the winter of 1944/45. Cockcroft, a trainee who had been seconded to No.77 Sqdn in order to gain combat experience, added more details about just who had seen the cylindrical object:

"Besides Ray and myself, other members of the crew to see the object, which was called to their attention by the Captain, were (1) the Bomb Aimer, (2) the Flight Engineer, (3) the Mid-Upper Gunner and (4) the Wireless Operator. The Navigator did not see the object, partly because of his position in the aircraft and particularly because he was extremely busy at this moment of the operation: neither did the Rear Gunner see it, for obvious reasons."

I think the first reaction of most of us was amazement because the object just had no right to be there. After a very short space of time – 20 to 30 seconds – it suddenly began moving away, accelerating extremely rapidly until it vanished from sight. The speed it attained seemed to us, in those days, completely incredible. It was certainly into thousands of mph."

As it accelerated, the outline became blurred, and the shape foreshortened. The size is more difficult to judge but it was very large, certainly much bigger than our own aircraft, appearing at least as long as a 'king-size' cigarette, or small cigar, held out at arms' length. We then completed our bomb run and returned to base."

The witness described the object's departure as being without the means of any recognisable source of propulsion:

"One further point was when it started its climb away, there was no apparent motive power – no rocket flare – and since the bombing time was so close and the target already visible, we were extremely busy and no instrument effect was noticed, even if any took place.."

The crew did not have much time to discuss the sighting as their job was to succesfully drop their bomb load over the target. However, as the object had made such an impression on the members of Smith's crew who witnessed it and its rapid departure, they reported their sighting on their return to Elvington:

"The intelligence officer debriefing us was given a description of the object, but we were unable to judge what importance was given to it and quite frankly, it was just another unusual phenomenon, which since apparently harmless was of far less importance than other wartime hazards."[83]

Cockroft and his colleagues were unable to find out what importance Air Intelligence had placed on their report. As in the Sobiński case, it seemed that as the mysterious objects did not seem to constitute any kind of threat to operations, officialdom was not prepared to take the sightings seriously, at least as far as the crews were concerned. The possibility that Bomber Command intelligence staff were becoming more receptive to reports of such encounters appeared to be receding fast. The pre-raid briefings about *flak* defences and enemy airfields near their intended routings to the targets never included details about "lights" or "balls of fire". It appeared to be something that crews either laughed about or never spoke of, at least until they experienced the phenomenon for themselves. The Lever case appeared to be something of an aberration in terms of stimulating interest in what was going on – or was work going on quietly behind the scenes?

Checking the records for No.77 Sqdn during its time at RAF Elvington, I found an error in the subsequent reporting of the May 1943 sighting. Every mention of this case I have come across whilst preparing this book lists the date of the raid on Essen as being on the night of the 26/27th. However, the ORB for No.77 Sqdn dealing with May 1943 does not list any raid being carried out by the squadron that evening. In fact, a planned mission that evening

involving sixteen crews that night was reduced to six before take-off and then cancelled completely at 2200 hours due to poor weather. The Essen raid occurred on the following evening, departing RAF Elvington on the 27th and returning to base in the early hours of the 28th.

Born in Vancouver, Sgt. Raymond Fraser Smith had enlisted in the RCAF in 1941. He took off from RAF Elvington at 2237 hours on the 27th, flying Halifax Mk.II JB911/KN-X. In addition to his usual crew of seven, Smith had Sgt. Cockcroft along as an eighth man. It was standard practice for trainees who would shortly be posted to an operational unit and have a crew of their own, to gain much-needed experience flying missions over real targets, facing the problems and dangers encountered by squadron aircrew. The No.77 Sqdn ORB for May 1943 indicates that the Essen mission was Cockcroft's first as a so-called "second dickey". In addition to gaining experience, having another pilot along gave the crew some hope of a safe return if anything happened to the "skipper". However, the task of carrying a "spare bod", especially a rookie, was not popular one among many crews, the extra pair of hands being usually tolerated, but only to a point. Despite Air Ministry misgivings, heavy bomber units were routinely flying with just a single pilot onboard each of their aircraft at this time.

The crew of JB911/KN-X were as follows (note the three crewmembers sharing the same surname, which presumably lead to nicknames being used in order to tell them apart!):

Sgt. Raymond Fraser Smith Pilot (Captain)
Sgt. Ronald C. Jones Flight Engineer
Sgt. Albert J. Page Navigator
Sgt. Harold Cork Air Bomber & front turret gunner
Sgt. G. E. Jones Wireless/Telegraphy (Radio) Operator
Sgt. F. S. Jones Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
Sgt. F. H. Pollock Air Gunner (rear turret)
Sgt. Gordon Newell Cockcroft 2nd Pilot

The ORB for No.77 Sqdn lists each mission and, more importantly, each aircraft and their crew manifest, together with a short summary of what was mentioned at the debriefing session. The comments for Sgt. Smith and his crew aboard Halifax JB911 include nothing about a large cylindrical object:

"The primary target was located, and Sgt. Smith bombed from 18,000 feet, bombs being released when red flares appeared in bomb sight. The glow of many fires was reflected on the cloud, which was 10/10ths. Many fires appeared to be 3 to 4 miles short of the markers. 3 packages c.32 nickels dropped in the target area. Aircraft was damaged by heavy flak from the target area. Searchlights were not numerous and were ineffective. Aircraft landed safely at base on completion of operation."[84]

Although Sgt. Smith's crew mentioned the long cylindrical object to the intelligence officer during the post-mission debrief, it is extremely unlikely that personnel listening to these types of stories would have any kind of explanation themselves. Whilst some staff had once been pilots or aircrew earlier in the war or even before it started, their own experience became less relevant due to the constantly changing nature of the war, and their knowledge of the phenomenon was presumably non-existent as they themselves did not participate in missions. In addition, intelligence officers were few in number and they were up against a time limit once combat-fatigued crews arrived back at base. Detailed information had to be obtained from groups of seven or eight tired and stressed young men, collated, typed up and finally forwarded onto other intelligence departments for analysis and possible action. This had to be done immediately in case there was something that needed to be actioned before the next mission, and with possibly sixteen or more crew reports to sift through per squadron (and sometimes two or three units per airfield), there was obviously little time spent on objects that appeared benign.

Could a combination of flares, glow from fires on the ground and searchlights explain the mysterious object that Sgt. Smith and five

other members of his crew saw near Essen that night in May 1943? There is also the brief mention of Nickel packages dropped near the target. These were bundles of propaganda leaflets that were simply pushed out of the aircraft's flare chute by a member of the crew when they were over a German city. Had piles of leaflets dropped by another RAF aircraft flying a similar type of mission, rapidly expanded in terms of overall size as they fluttered downwards in its slipstream? Did a swirling mass of paper contribute to an overall misinterpretation of other light sources in the skies above the target, one fuelled by fatigue, combat stress and damage to the aircraft caused by *flak*? If the strange object had only been seen by the inexperienced "second dickey", Sgt. Cockcroft, the whole experience may well have been written off as just "an attack of the jitters" on the part of a rookie pilot flying his first "op". However, given the description of the enormous porthole-endowed cylinder viewed by other members of Sgt. Smith's crew, it is hard to see how so many experienced airmen could have mistaken flares and fires that they would have almost taken for granted by that stage in their operational "tour" of missions.

In case anything was mentioned in the files relating to the other squadrons that participated in the same raid, I took the liberty of checking the ORBs for four more RAF night bomber units, namely No.10, No.35, No.51 and No.76 Sqdns. All four had sent numerous aircraft out on the evening of the 27th to attack Essen. The crew of No.76 Sqdn Halifax Mk.V DK167/MP-F witnessed a huge explosion in the target area *"which made a big reflection in the sky."*[85] This occurred around 0100 hours, whilst two further crews from the same squadron reported similar large orange explosions at around 0045 and 0115 hours. These were attributed to bomb hits in the target area. The reports of large, orange-coloured explosions lighting up the sky were also repeated by several crews belonging to No.51 Sqdn.[86] The No.77 Sqdn ORB does not listed the time when Sgt. Smith reached the target, so it is not possible to link the sighting with any of the above reports. Two crews from No.10 Sqdn reported witnessing a large explosion together with a "blue flash" prior to

bombing the target.[87] The ORB for No.35 Sqdn included frequent comments about the huge amount of smoke and haze above the city but did not list anything out of the ordinary for a wartime bombing mission. None of the four squadrons' crews saw anything that could be linked to Smith's sighting, unless of course their reports were also not included in their squadron ORBs. The official records do not confirm Cockcroft's report of a long cylindrical object but as we have seen, this is not necessarily unusual.

What is not mentioned in connection with this particular case is a subsequent entry in the No.77 Sqdn ORB for the following evening's attack on Wuppertal. The crew of Halifax Mk.II DT793/KN-E, skippered by Sgt. James Byrne, reported seeing a strange object just after a large explosion had been seen on the ground as they were leaving the target area. *"A large meteor was seen, like balls shot up, one at the target and 2 a short way off."*[88] There are no further details regarding this sighting, but the description of the "meteor" is intriguing. Sgt. Byrne's was the only crew to mention this, but several others reported the huge explosion, which sent smoke rising to over 10,000 feet. The other four squadrons listed above also participated in this raid although there are no reports of a "meteor" or anything similar listed in their mission summaries. Three of the crew of Halifax DT793, including Sgt. Byrne, were killed when the aircraft was shot down by *flak* on a raid to Nürnberg three months later. If either Smith or Byrne's sighting reports had been forwarded up the chain of command as W/O Lever's had, then unfortunately no evidence for this exists.

May 1943 appears to have been an important month in terms of possible UFO sightings by the RAF. According to Nick Redfern's *Cosmic Crashes: The Incredible Story of the UFOs That Fell to Earth*, published in 1999, a mysterious object had been spotted that month by bomber pilot Gordon W. Cammell. Redfern included the pilot's recollection that:

"On one occasion, while crossing the English Channel after returning from a bombing mission over Germany, all of the crew viewed what

appeared to be a 'huge orange ball' on or near the sea, seven or eight thousand feet below the Lancaster."[89]

Furthermore, the object appeared stationary and was witnessed by the entire crew for about ten minutes, during which time its brightness did not change. Opinions differed about what had been seen but the general consensus was that it was not an aircraft or a ship. A German *Sperrballon* ("barrage balloon") may well have been one possible explanation, although these were not ball-shaped, nor were they orange in colour.

Redfern did not include details of which squadron Cammell belonged to, but he did mention that on return to RAF East Wretham in Suffolk, the crew provided the debriefing officer with a description of their sighting. The intelligence officer had no idea what they had seen, and the object's identity remained unresolved. It was relatively easy to trace which unit the pilot was serving with in May 1943 and a quick trawl of the records showed that F/O Gordon W. Cammell, Royal New Zealand Air Force, had been posted to No.115 Sqdn at RAF East Wretham on 15th May 1943 from No.1657 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Stradishall in Suffolk.[90] Cammell had therefore recently completed his conversion course onto four-engined heavy bombers at Stradishall, initially flying twin-engined Airspeed Oxfords and then progressing onto the larger Stirling bomber, in preparation for his posting to a front-line unit. He brought his trainee crew from No.1657 HCU and joined "A" Flight of No.115 Squadron.

Cammell's crew was as follows, comprising mostly Volunteer Reservists plus a fellow New Zealander who had trained to be a pilot but had not made the grade, electing to re-train as a bombardier instead:

F/O Gordon William Cammell, RNZAF Pilot (Captain)
F/O F. G. Cooper, RAFVR Navigator
F/O Halford Douglas Pye, RNZAF Air Bomber (Bomb Aimer)
Sgt. George Albert Parker, RAFVR Wireless/Telegraphy Operator

P/O Robert Ryland-Reid, RAFVR Air Gunner (rear turret)
P/O David Stuart Williams, RAFVR Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
Sgt. Eric Gordon Baker Flight Engineer

As a rookie crew on No.115 Sqdn, Cammell and his comrades were given a number of “working up” missions to perform before being allowed to join the other squadron aircraft on raids over mainland European targets. Their first sortie was therefore a “Gardening” (minelaying) mission off the coast of the West Friesian Islands on the night of 16/17th May 1943, flying in Lancaster Mk.II DS619/KO-O. A similar mission to the coast off La Rochelle was carried out the following night and a third off Bordeaux on the night of 21/22nd May. At 0002 hours on the 24th, Cammell headed for Dortmund as “second dickey” in P/O Finnerty’s aircraft, in order to receive operational experience before undertaking a raid himself. His own crew’s first mission as part of the main squadron effort occurred two days later, when he took off from East Wretham in DS629/KO-D to attack Düsseldorf. Shortly before midnight on the 27th, Cammell and his crew set off for Essen in Lancaster Mk.II DS655/KO-M. The aircraft was hit by *flak* over the target area and its bomb-load detonated, the pilot being forcibly ejected from his cockpit by a huge explosion. He was the only survivor from his crew of seven and landed safely by parachute, becoming a prisoner of war.

Given the location of the sighting of the “huge orange ball”, it was therefore possible to pin down on which evenings the event could have occurred, as the exact date did not appear in Redfern’s book. The only time when Cammell and his crew were overflying water on the return from a mission over Germany was during the early hours of 26th May, when he landed Lancaster DS629 back at base at 0355 hours. He had, of course, flown an extra mission as “second dickey” on the 24th, but not as the Lancaster’s skipper. However, it is unlikely that the return route from Dortmund or Düsseldorf across to East Wretham would have overflown the English Channel. Bombers based in Suffolk flew along tracks over the North Sea to Holland and then down the Rhein instead. In fact, although Cammell stated that his sighting occurred on a return flight from Germany, an overflight of

the Channel would place it during one of the minelaying sorties instead. Since the date and exact location are unknown, it is impossible to know for certain which of the three “Gardening” missions was involved, although the first one off Holland would not have involved a flight over the Channel either. It is therefore likely that the pilot’s sighting took place on either the 17/18th or 21/22nd May 1943. Predictably, the No.115 Sqdn ORB for May 1943 provides no help whatsoever in finding details of the “orange ball” that F/O Cammell claimed he saw. The lack of official documentation to corroborate his story is annoying. However, after WW2 the pilot went on to have a long and distinguished military flying career, so it seems unlikely that he simply made up the details of his sighting.

In 1967, Gordon Cammell completed a manuscript about his flying experiences, entitled *More Lives Than a Cat: Flying in Three World Air Forces*, but it was not published until 2018. His autobiography includes a brief summary of the “orange ball” sighting, but the details do not go beyond those reprinted in Redfern’s book. However, what is interesting is his recollections about knowledge of encounters that were experienced by service colleagues in 1953, plus his own sightings of large orange balls flying near his holiday home in British Columbia, Canada, in the summer of 1991. A hint of Cammell’s wartime crew’s relative inexperience is given by a passage involving a sighting of a possible enemy aircraft on the return flight of a minelaying mission:

“As we crossed the Channel in bright moonlight, my rear gunner informed me that another aircraft was flying in formation with us at a lower altitude. I asked my gunner for a report on the other aircraft’s position and to my surprise he advised me it was still below us. After a short delay, I heard him laugh, he reported that the other aircraft was in fact our own shadow.”

Although included in both Nick Redfern’s book and his own autobiography, the source of Cammell’s report appears to be Vol.12, No.1 of the American *UFO Magazine*, published in 1997.

More “rockets” were noticed by RAF crews in May 1943. On the night of the 25/26th, during a raid on Düsseldorf, a single “meteor” projectile was spotted over s’Hertogensbosch, located in the North Brabant district of the Netherlands. An official report compared the lack of sightings on that raid with the “prolific numbers” witnessed during the Dortmund mission which took place the previous evening. [91] The better weather for the latter raid was suggested as a contributing factor.

No.77 Sqdn were still encountering strange objects and lights in the skies above Germany in June 1943. On the night of the 12/13th, the squadron was part of RAF Bomber Command’s effort against Düsseldorf. P/O J. B. Marshall was flying Halifax Mk.II JB850/KN-B, a replacement for DT632, which had been shot down by *Oberleutnant* August Geiger of 7./NJG 1 over Holland on 13th May. Marshall had taken off from Elvington in North Yorkshire at 2315 hours on the 12th, and his bomb-aimer, Sgt. G. R. Hill, dropped the aircraft’s load of 2x 1,000lb bombs, 630x 4lb incendiaries and 48x 30lb incendiaries on Düsseldorf, plus a package of propaganda leaflets. According to the No.77 Sqdn ORB:

“15 miles north-west of the target, a meteor-like projectile shot up from the ground to 22,000 feet, travelled horizontal, turned at right angles, emitted two explosions, resumed original course, and fell.”[92]

Whatever this mysterious “meteor” was, it changed directions at least twice, if not more times, during the course of the crew’s observations. If it had been an experimental German *flak* rocket, it would have instead travelled on a ballistic trajectory before falling back down to earth. Anti-aircraft missile guidance systems had not yet been developed enough at that time to be incorporated into the development programmes. What appeared on the face of it to be a summary of the same event, was included in that week’s FLO Report:

"A rocket with a yellow head, possibly a 'meteor' projectile, was seen near Terschelling at 22,200 feet; it moved horizontally for about one minute."[93]

However, Terschelling is one of the West Friesian Islands and therefore not in the vicinity of Düsseldorf. Therefore, this particular "rocket" must have been witnessed by a second crew that night. The reports were now coming in thick and fast. Two of the bombers that attacked Köln on the night of 28/29th June 1943 were flying in the vicinity of Aachen when their crews noticed a strange projectile heading upwards:

"15 miles south of Aachen two crews reported a rocket-propelled projectile which climbed and dived in a wide arc for about half a minute and then disappeared into a cloud. A stationary glow was afterwards seen through the cloud as though the projectile had exploded on the ground. This description has some resemblance to the 'meteor' projectiles described in Consolidated FLO Report No.159."[94]

During a raid on Aachen which was carried out on the night of 13/14th July 1943, a "projectile" was seen to burst at around 20,000 feet near Rotterdam. According to the crew who witnessed this object, there was a flash of light on the ground, from which they stated they could trace the path of the rocket upwards until it point that it burst. In addition to an incredibly high rate of speed, which led the *flak* specialists to believe it was rocket-powered, the missile appeared to be very accurate.[95] Despite this, there was no warhead and no damage resulted to the RAF aircraft involved. If a new enemy weapon was being deployed, it was clearly having no effect whatsoever on operations, at least beyond causing various Flak Liaison Officers, clerks and intelligence staff to collate, type out and read more reports concerning the devices.

Something similar appeared in a Flak Liaison Report drafted towards the end of July 1943, although by that stage a new

nickname appeared too. “Catherine Wheels” had certainly not been mentioned before, but this was just the first of a few recorded encounters with “rockets” that displayed strange tendencies:

“A large number of rocket-like projectiles were seen in the target area, generally in salvoes of three or four and with a yellow-red trace which first became visible at a fairly low altitude. The projectiles were observed to burst at heights varying from 8,000 to 20,000 feet; on bursting they appeared to spin like ‘Catherine Wheels’, throwing off coloured tracer or incandescent fragments, which in some cases were also seen to burst. The area covered by these cascades was reported to be up to about 300 feet in radius.

More than one aircrew reported such projectiles having burst close to their aircraft with virtually no resultant blast effect, and it would seem that this phenomenon represents yet another variant in the enemy’s programme of deterrent pyrotechnics.”[96]

It was possible that the Germans had invented some type of distraction or decoy flare, launched by a hitherto unknown rocket, although details of the latter should have been known nearly eighty years after their employment in battle. However, the bursting effect that was reported suggested a type of *flak* or flare being used. Too late for this particular report was a further “rocket-like projectile” noted by the crew of No.77 Sqdn Halifax Mk.II JD324/KN-U on a mission to Hamburg on the night of 27/28th July 1943, the second of two major RAF raids against the city in the space of four days. This attack had caused a firestorm, which engulfed several districts, destroying an area of at least 21km² and killing at least 18,000 people. According to the unit’s ORB, the crew *“flew through the burst of a rocket like projectile, shot up the apex of a searchlight, without damage. Burst had a ‘Catherine Wheel’ effect.”*[97] It has not been possible to work out what kind of weapon this report referred to. The Halifax was being flown by Sqn Ldr Noel Wright, who was killed on operations the following month along with four members of his

regular crew. This would not be the only time that “Catherine wheels” were reported during the course of the war.

This was not the only report of a “rocket” that evening. Major Mullock, the No.5 Group Flak Liaison Officer, tagged along as an observer, flying as a mid-upper gunner in a Lancaster Mk.III based at Bardney in Lincolnshire. Although his account did not include the details of the squadron involved, the individual aircraft he flew in or the name of the pilot, presumably for security reasons, this information was easy enough to obtain. At that time, No.9 Sqdn was the only unit to be based at Bardney. Pulling the relevant ORB file, I was able to confirm that the Flak Liaison Officer had flown in Lancaster ED700/WS-O, piloted by Wg. Cdr. Patrick Burnett, the unit’s commanding officer.[98] Burnett’s Lancaster was one of 787 that took off that night to attack Hamburg. Not included in this file, however, were details of a couple of encounters with mystery “rockets” over Germany. Thankfully, these are included in Major Mullock’s personal report that was distributed by M.I.14(e), a department responsible for German intelligence collection, to various Air Ministry, RAF and USAAF organisations:

“Two rockets were also observed, one about 7,000 feet below us, travelling very fast horizontally and in the opposite direction – the rocket left a long trace and was visible for 12-15 seconds after which it travelled towards the ground in a gentle curve and was lost to view. The second was travelling from starboard to port some way behind and below us – three searchlights were attempting to follow this rocket – it was quite definitely not an aircraft on fire because it was travelling at an incredibly high speed.”[99]

At last, one of the Flak Liaison Officers had seen two of the mysterious “rocket projectiles” in action over Germany. A trained *flak* observer such as Major Mullock would have been expected to write a detailed sighting report and that certainly occurred after he returned to England. However, in terms of explaining just what was going on, the RAF and Air Ministry appeared to be no further

forward. Details taken by someone considered an expert in anti-aircraft weaponry did not lead to more knowledge or understanding. One of the “rockets” was noted flying at around 12,000 feet, which was above altitudes that any *Scheinsignalraketen* could reach. Wg. Cdr. Burnett remained in the RAF after the war and after promotion to Air Commodore, became a Director of Intelligence at the Air Ministry in November 1958, his final post before retirement.[100] It is possible that he was re-acquainted with reports of strange objects whilst he performed this role, fifteen years after encountering mysterious rockets over Germany.

Michael Bentine, the famous actor, comic actor and founding member of *The Goons* served in the RAF as an Intelligence Officer before being seconded to MI9, the organisation that supported European resistance networks and also helped Allied prisoners of war to evade capture or escape from German camps. After the war, he spoke about his wartime experiences debriefing crews who said they had encountered mysterious lights or luminous flying balls whilst on operations. Bentine was interviewed by British UFO investigator and author Jenny Randles, with details of the conversation being included in *The Complete Book of UFOs*, written by Peter Hough and Randles, published in 1994. Writing about Bentine, Randles stated that:

“In late 1944 [he] was an intelligence officer stationed in eastern England dealing with Free Polish troops. He had to debrief bomber crews after a raid on the German secret weapons site at Peenemünde on the Baltic coast, where deadly aerial technology was developed. Bentine reported how they described seeing these lights. He did not take them seriously until several crews had come back and told identical stories. They spoke of being ‘pursued by a light which was pulsating and had flown around the aircraft.”

According to Randles, the former intelligence officer had suggested that the airmen had witnessed St Elmo’s Fire. This was a sudden discharge of static, manifesting as small balls of light next to aerials

or ships' masts. Bentine had believed that this was a possible explanation, but the aircrews were adamant. They had seen St Elmo's Fire for themselves and were convinced that what they were encountering over Germany represented something totally different. Bentine was clearly perplexed by the reports:

"As far as they were concerned, it was some form of German secret weapon. So, I said: 'What did it do *to you?' And they said 'Nothing.' So, I said it was not a very effective weapon!"*[101]

A great story, but was it true? Randles mentioned that Bentine worked with the Polish volunteer forces. We have already looked at a case involving one of the units comprising Poles who had escaped their country to fight on against the Germans. The RAF had three such squadrons in Bomber Command, No.300, No.301 and No.305 Sqdns (the latter changing roles when moving to twin-engined North American Mitchell medium bombers in August 1943). A fourth bomber squadron operated anti-submarine patrols as part of RAF Coastal Command. Bentine's account has some inaccuracies as per in the conversation included in Gough and Randles' book, and its subsequent reproduction in other books and websites.

The Peenemünde raid took place on the night of 17/18th August 1943, not 1944. This was the only RAF bombing mission on the German V-2 development and testing facility, although the USAAF did carry out three daylight raids, one in July 1944 and two the following month. Bentine's autobiography, *The Reluctant Jester*, published in 1992, places him at a school for RAF Intelligence officers in August 1943, and he joined No.300 Sqdn at Hemswell after completing the course. The majority of missions flown by No.300 Sqdn between August and November 1943 involved dropping mines in the sea around the north-western coast of Germany and off Denmark, with a few raids over Hanover thrown in for good measure. As an RAF officer, he would not have debriefed American bomber crews so this would rule out any link with the USAAF raids on Peenemünde.

Not only was the year recorded for Bentine's anecdote incorrect, but so was the particular unit involved. None of the three Polish volunteer bomber units participated in the Peenemünde raid in August 1943. Randles stated that Bentine worked with the Polish forces, and therefore it is a reasonable assumption that this would have been No.300 Sqdn. No.301 Sqdn had been disbanded in April that year due to a critical lack of aircrew, whilst the other two were equipped with Wellington bombers, which did not have the range necessary to reach the target as they would have run out of fuel on the return flight. Their crews were not re-assigned to longer-ranged aircraft so did not participate in the raid at all. In any case, Bentine was more than likely still undergoing his intelligence officer training at the time of the Peenemünde mission. Indeed, in *The Reluctant Jester*, he states that the first debriefing session he took on his own was after a raid on Düsseldorf.[102] However, No.300 Sqdn did not attack this target between August and November 1943 as it was engaged on "Gardening" (mining) sorties. Bentine, of course, may have been mixing up the date, squadron, and raid, although it is unlikely that he was serving as an intelligence officer on an active squadron when the Peenemünde raid happened. It is a lovely anecdote, however, although I wonder why it was not included in his autobiography, as it has plenty of others from the war.

The reason for the inaccuracies may be down to Bentine's memory or Randles' own notes from their interview. However, the former was a guest on Sir Patrick Moore's monthly BBC TV astronomy programme *The Sky At Night* in 1979, and their conversation soon turned to the subject of flying saucers. Moore asked Bentine if, as he had served as an intelligence officer with the RAF during the war and had debriefed pilots and crews, had he received lots of flying saucer reports?

"Well, no, that was the winter of '43-'44, we were doing specialised raids on Stettin, that part of the Baltic, and some pilots coming back from a raid, flying Lancasters, so that's about 24,000 feet in the air, they'd seen lights in the sky. Now we thought they were airborne

lights by German fighters. Now they were in the area where there was the new research station at Peenemünde, so it could *have been a special weapon, so they'd fired at these lights with their mid-upper turret and rear turrets and had no result, so they hadn't shot the light out. All that they'd got was a light that was flying round and round the aeroplane."*[103]

Sir Patrick also confirmed he had heard about "Foo Fighters" during the war, when he was a navigator in an RAF bomber crew. Bentine's answer here shifts the time-period forward four or five months, to when he had been posted to RAF Wickenby, home to No.12 and No.626 Sqdns. Maybe his story was true after all, but it did not involve a Polish crew, or the raid on Peenemünde, as Gough and Randles' book seemed to imply. It seemed as though the raids were on Stettin instead. If his recollections were to be believed, there were other cases of air gunners shooting at the mysterious lights. If true, the March 1942 case was not an isolated one. If not, then Bentine seemed to be mixing up parts of separate stories and mixing them together.

Some of the descriptions of incidents seen over Germany by bomber crews appear strange at first glance, although the following could well have been a good description of one of the so-called "Scarecrow" flak bursts. On the early morning of 10th August 1943, F/Sgt. A. W. Galletly of No.77 Sqdn, flying Halifax JD301/KN-L, reported a strange occurrence on a raid against the city of Mannheim:

"In the vicinity of the target, a burning object was seen, believed to be an aircraft, cascading multi-coloured balls from a red centre, falling slowly and emitting much smoke."[104]

If it had not been for the suggestion that this was a "burning aircraft", the report might well fall under the category of a wartime "Foo Fighter" case. However, in this case, the truth was probably much more prosaic. This was undoubtedly a "Scarecrow", the much-

rumoured German morale-breaking device that resembled an aircraft going down in flames. RAF crews and intelligence analysis alike suggested that the Germans had invented some sort of decoy which looked like a bomber exploding in mid-air, and then falling in flames. In reality, these were marker flares "cooking off" after an aircraft was severely damaged by a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter or a direct hit from *flak* bursts, although a burning bomber would have in all likelihood descended much quicker after a fatal blow. Later the same month, another No.77 Sqdn aircraft, this time JD301/KN-L, flown by F/Lt. P. Kendrick, reported seeing an odd-looking red light in the sky. His debriefing report in the squadron ORB for the raid on Berlin on the night of 23/24th August 1943 gave more details and a possible explanation, although it is unlikely that a light could have stayed airborne for so long:

"Crew reported red light, similar to PFF T.I.s [Pathfinder Force Target Indicators] but not cascading, from approx. 07.00E to target and thence to Baltic coast, believed route marking for night-fighters."[105]

"Fighter flares" were used by *Luftwaffe* night-fighter crews although the tiny parachutes fitted to the flares would not have kept them at altitude for a long period of time. In any case, such devices were dropped well below the bomber stream, usually just above any cloud cover layer to silhouette enemy aircraft. This made them easier to spot by night-fighter crews flying above the RAF machines.

September 1943 brought no end to reports of strange aerial phenomenon over the skies of Occupied Europe. On the night of the 5/6th, the crew of No.77 Sqdn Halifax Mk.II BB284/KN-Y, flown by Sgt. R. J. Jones, took off for Mannheim at 1933 hours. At around 2308, whilst flying eastwards in the vicinity of the target area at about 19,000 feet, a *Luftwaffe* Fw 190 was noted coned by German searchlights about 1,000 feet above their Halifax. At the same time, *"greenish rockets giving off white star-like fragmentations were noted in the same area"*, and it was assumed that the fighter pilot had somehow fired them, possibly in an attempt to warn the searchlight

crews that they had latched onto the wrong target.[106] This is as good as explanation as anything else. Such aircraft were certainly being flown on night-fighter missions, although their pilots flew without the benefit of onboard radar, being guided towards the vicinity of targets by ground stations. The flak defences may also have been unable to distinguish a relatively small Fw 190 from a much larger Halifax, at least initially. Due to manpower constraints, *Hitler-Jugend* ("Hitler Youth") teens were being recruited to help man *flak* guns and other ground installations, although the guns still maintained an essential core of trained personnel.

The US Eighth Air Force's *Weekly Air Intelligence Digest* for the week ended 5th September 1943 carried details of an RAF night mission on Berlin the previous month.[107] In a section titled *"Rocket Used Against Night Bombers"*, the bulletin included information about the 23/24th August raid:

"A number of rockets, some apparently fired from aircraft and others of the type with subsidiary propellant charges fired from the ground, were observed during the RAF raid on Berlin night of the 23/24th August, according to the Consolidated F. L. O. Report of M. I. 14(E), British War Office. One crew saw a large orange ball, about the size of a football, rapidly approaching their aircraft. The rear gunner scored a hit on it, and it disintegrated into 'bits' of fire which burned for some time."[108]

Information about the new remote-controlled Henschel Hs 293 glide bomb was also included, suggesting it may have been responsible for some of the reports, although with hindsight, the nature of this weapon meant that it could never have been used in the manner being reported by aircrews. The Hs 293, an anti-shipping missile, will be discussed further in Chapter 13, in connection with a pair of secret weapons that were claimed to be responsible for the "Foo Fighter" sightings. The football-sized object was also mentioned in a *flak* report issued at the end of August 1943.[109]

An appendix to a September 1943 FLO Report that dealt with flak phenomena commented on the “rockets”, indicating that the RAF and Air Ministry intelligence staff appeared still to be in the dark in terms of trying to determine just what these objects were:

“Reports by aircrew suggesting the use by the enemy of some kind of AA rocket projectiles have been received many times during the past year, and with increasing frequency during recent months. Observations by night have frequently been characterised by a visible trace and many of the reports have referred to the ‘comet-like’ appearance of the phenomena. Reports from day operations have on several occasions referred to parachutes with wire attachments being seen to emanate from the bursts.”[110]

“Cable bombs” were being reported during American daylight raids and will be briefly examined along with other strange phenomena in Chapter 5. During the same month, another interesting entry was logged in the No.77 Sqdn ORB. At 2150 hours on the evening of the 27th, F/Lt. R. T. Fitzgerald and his crew were flying toward Hanover at around 18,000 feet. When they were at position 52.35N 0840E, they witnessed *“about a dozen u/i night-fighters (burning red fore white aft), flying 270 deg towards main bomber stream were seen, then they turned back on 90 deg towards target.”*[111] The *Nachtjagd* (the *Luftwaffe* night-fighter force) did not hunt in packs, let alone any kind of formation, and enemy aircraft would not have flown with navigation lights lit unless they wanted to be seen. However, why would a pilot wish to advertise his presence to the enemy? Whilst the existence of a group of German fighters flying in loose formation towards the RAF “heavies” may have been possible that night, the standard doctrine for that period was for the *Luftwaffe* ground controllers to vector in night-fighters from a number of airfields towards the bomber stream. This would have resulted in single machines or very small groups of fighters arriving independently, and they were never wielded as one large force, unlike the RAF day-

fighter squadrons directed against German bombers during the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940.

A further odd phenomenon was noted the following evening by the experienced pilot Sqn Ldr Edgar Badcoe, again from No.77 Sqdn, on a raid to Bochum. Whilst flying over the target area at about 18,000 feet in Halifax JD385/KN-C, he and his crew witnessed *"a very large orange ball of fire bursting into multi-coloured strings of bright lights – chiefly greens and whites, lasting about ½ minute."* This could well have been a new kind of *Luftwaffe* "fighter flare" but its designation and exact nature are still unknown. None of the other crews from his squadron reported a similar event, although noted a "brilliant white explosion" over the target area at 2214 hours.[112] "Scarecrow" flares were also reported, and Badcoe's sighting may well have been another one of these in the target area.

FLO Reports continued to provide strange "Phenomena" reports: they even listed these items under this very title to separate them from accounts of "ordinary" *flak* effects and sightings. These can be found within the Consolidated FLO Reports that are located within various historical archives. My copies came via the Air Force Historical Research Agency's holdings, but they are microfilmed, and some pages are incredibly difficult to read. Thankfully, much of the information remains legible. The reports include a mixture of American and British information, gleaned from both day and night operations, and include plenty of references to "balls of fire", "swarms of bees" and "rockets". We have already seen the strange reference to rockets given in the FLO report for August 1943. Another of these was the Consolidated FLO Report which covered October. It gives information for the various bombing raids conducted during the month, but a curious item is listed for the Kassel mission on the night of the 22nd/23rd:

"There were several reports of 'rockets' fired in groups of three, up to 20,000 feet. These emitted showers of sparks during horizontal flight and finally exploded. There is insufficient evidence as to whether these were fired from the ground or from enemy aircraft."[113]

The FLO report covering November 1943 provided more details of mysterious “rockets” being fired at Allied bombers during that month:

“Over Munster, ‘rockets’ were fired singly at 30 second intervals, over a period of 15 minutes. Amber-colored traces were seen, these died down for 1-2 seconds and then the projectile burst with a small flash at approximately 20,000 feet. Similar projectiles fired over Berlin, Boulogne and Texel were described as leaving ‘whitish’ traces and bursting with orange-colored flashes at 25,000-30,000 feet.”[114]

Readers who may write these reports off as being surface-to-air missiles or other types of rocket may be unfamiliar with German *flak* rocket development during WW2. No weapon of this type ever saw service, and whilst decoy *flak* missiles existed, it is unlikely that they were deployed as widely as the German capital, northern France and an island off the north coast of Holland. As we will see when we turn our attention to the 1944 reports from the Balkans, these decoys could not reach 25,000 feet in any case. The V-2 ballistic missile could of course reach that kind of height, but the early test examples were still being tested across at Peenemünde at that stage of the war and therefore would not have been encountered over Holland, and especially in the dark, in November 1943.

However, a similar report from the following month included more details that suggested that these “rockets” were not following normal ballistic trajectories, which would have been the usual profiles for devices of this nature. More of these objects were noticed during a Berlin raid that occurred on the night of 2nd/3rd December 1943:

“Rocket projectiles were again reported over the target area. Some were described as bursting ‘with a comet tail’ burning for 8 seconds. There was also a report of what appeared to be a rocket projectile travelling horizontally at 21,000 feet and parallel to the aircraft, leaving a fire-track behind. As this projectile was first observed above the cloud, it is not possible to say whether it was fired from the

ground or an aircraft. The projectile moved forward in jerks and resembled a ball of fire, but no bursts or explosion were seen, and it eventually disappeared."[115]

It would have been extremely difficult for even the rudimentary surface-to-air missile being developed in 1944 to carry out these kinds of manoeuvres, especially in matching the altitude and speed of a bomber in level flight, and for the length of time witnessed. To suggest the Germans could have accomplished this type of performance in November 1943 ignores everything known about their wartime *flak* rocket development.

Several websites refer to Sqn Ldr P. Wells and his logbook entry in December 1943 which simply states: *"Screaming dog-fight with the light."* To my knowledge, few details have been unearthed regarding this case, so I did some digging into the official files together with some research into the pilot. If someone had stumbled across the post-sortie details that ended up the ORB without knowing the link with the dogfight quote, then they may not have realised what they were looking at.

The pilot's name was Squadron Leader Patrick Hardy Vesey Wells, and he learnt to fly in 1938, becoming part of the RAF Volunteer Reserve. Shot down twice in 1940 whilst serving with No.249 Sqdn, he received serious injuries in the second incident and was one of Archibald McIndoe's "Guinea Pigs", receiving pioneering plastic surgery for his burns. Moving to Malta in May 1941 with the unit, he was injured for a third time whilst trying to get airborne during a scramble. In early 1943 he was posted to No.73 Sqdn, flying Hurricane Mk.IIs in the ground-attack role. Wells was promoted to Squadron Leader and posted to No.255 Sqdn as a flight commander in Italy on 11th September 1943, taking charge of a detached flight of Bristol Beaufighter Mk.VIF night-fighters based at the squadron's satellite base at Pomigliano. Units were occasionally split between different airfields due to overcrowding at the main bases in Allied-occupied Italy. His detachment was responsible for defending the Naples region against *Luftwaffe* night bombers and

intruders but based on the number of “kills” recorded in the October to December 1943 period, enemy aircraft in the skies over central and southern Italy appeared to be few and far between.

The No.255 Sqdn ORB for December does, however, give plenty of information. At 1755 hours on the evening of the 14th, Sqn Ldr Wells and his Canadian navigator, F/Sgt. Nestor J. Izowsky, took off from Pomigliano to carry out a defensive patrol in his Beaufighter Mk.VIF. The identity of his aircraft that night is unknown as, unlike the files regarding numerous other RAF squadrons, No.255 Sqdn’s ORB does not include this information. However, nothing should be read into this, as each unit appears to have had its own style of recording and squadrons operating abroad, from temporary airfields near the front line often worked under different rules than ones based on the UK mainland. However, the ORB carries the full post-mission report, and it is included in full here:

“On patrol under ATOM in Naples area. At 19.30 when in area of Volturno river flying at 7,000ft, saw the amber light of an aircraft about 2,000ft below going S.E. Turned on it but it turned and climbed sharply. Target outclimbed fighter which was only just able to turn on him in a series of orbits up to 12,000ft. Followed visually by its amber light but unable to keep up with it and Visual was lost. Range at first estimated at 3,000ft. No A.I. contact. No assistance given by ATOM G.C.I. During chase obtained contact to port when turning starboard but did not follow it.”[116]

The twin-engined Beaufighter was a powerful aircraft, its Bristol Hercules engines propelling it to speeds of 310 mph at around 10,000 feet. Used as both a night-fighter and night intruder as well as on daylight anti-shipping strikes, the type served in the northern European, Mediterranean, and Far Eastern theatres of the war. Wells and Izowsky would have normally been vectored onto enemy aircraft by Ground Control Intercept radar (GCI, their local station in Italy being codenamed “Atom”). Once they were within a few miles of the target, Izowsky would have picked it up on his Airborne Intercept

Mk.VIII radar set. However, it appears that the ground station did not detect the target before Wells noticed it flying below his Beaufighter. Whilst the squadron had been flying from a base in western Sicily in August 1943, GCI had operated from a tank landing ship moored off the island, and the over-worked radar operators simply could not cope with the number of contacts. However, things had settled down by December 1943 but the target that Sqn Ldr Wells had noticed was not being picked up by ground radar staff. In addition, F/Sgt. Izowsky's own radar set onboard the Beaufighter was not picking up the target either. The lack of coverage by GCI could have been explained by the British aircraft being out of range or high ground being in the way, although this would not explain why Izowsky's set could not pick the target up when it was so close to them.

Once he had sighted the amber light 2,000 feet below him, Wells turned and descended towards whatever was emitting the light, no doubt in an attempt to get behind it and into a firing position. Whatever the object was, it suddenly rose to meet him, and the engagement began spiralling upwards. The light appeared to possess a much better performance than the Beaufighter as it started outclimbing the night-fighter. The crew could barely keep up as the light ascended, and yet it still did not register on Izowsky's radar set. The dogfight reported by Sqn Ldr Wells started above 3,000 feet and ascended to 12,000 feet before he lost sight of the light.

Although the mission report states that the unknown object was an "aircraft", Wells failed to identify anything beyond the light. According to correspondence between Wells and researcher Andy Roberts, the pilot had already witnessed "the light" when he was serving with No.73 Sqdn in the Tunisian desert. This was after several of his colleagues had done so. At the time, Wells remained rather sceptical of their sightings, at least until he had his own encounter. He claimed that "the light" had taken up position behind him at one point, moving from side to side as it chased them, but it did not appear to display any aggressive tendencies. No doubt at the time, with the likelihood of a *Luftwaffe* aircraft on his tail and about to open fire at any moment, the Sqn Ldr would have thought differently.

In this case, the official record appears to confirm much of what the pilot reported after the war, although it stops short of classifying the target as an “unknown”, simply labelling it as an “aircraft”. This case is interesting as it is similar in certain respects to the USS *Nimitz* encounter in November 2004. Two of *Nimitz’s* Boeing F/A-18F Super Hornet aircraft were vectored towards an unknown contact which had been tracked by the guided missile cruiser USS *Princeton’s* AN/SPY-1B radar. However, the APG-73 airborne intercept sets fitted in the F/A-18Fs could not pick up the target. As with Nestor Izowsky’s AI Mk.VIII set back in December 1943, the airborne sets of 2004 were unable to detect an object that became visible to four crew onboard the two US Navy aircraft. Commander David Fravor, commanding officer of Strike Fighter Squadron 41 (VFA-41) “Black Aces” and leading the flight of two aircraft, elected to descend towards a mysterious white oblong (described as looking like a “Tic Tac”) moving erratically above the wave tops.[117] As Fravor descended towards it, the “Tic Tac” suddenly stood on one end and shot upwards, mirroring the pilot’s spiralling descent. Sqn Ldr Wells would have recognised the similarities as the white object and the US Navy jet were soon on the opposite sides of a circular flight pattern, the pilot trying unsuccessfully to position himself on the tail of the “Tic Tac”. At one point, Fravor “cut the corner” in an attempt to get behind the object but it shot off into the distance at unbelievably high speed.[118]

I am not suggesting here that the December 1943 and November 2004 objects were the same vehicle, but there are similarities between the two engagements, which may indicate that the encounters in WW2 were simply a much earlier manifestation of what would be reported long after the war. As for WW2, well, more high strangeness was still to come.

However, crews on night operations had not yet finished seeing strange phenomenon during 1943. During a second December raid on Berlin which was carried out on the night of the 16/17th, further “rocket projectiles” were encountered over the target area, in a repeat of the earlier mission. It was assumed by crews and

intelligence staff that these devices had been fired by enemy aircraft, although with the benefit of hindsight, we know that the *Luftwaffe* did not use rocket mortars at night.[119] It is therefore puzzling to try and understand exactly what was responsible for these “rocket” reports. Simply suggesting German secret weapons were to blame does not really address the question of which ones were involved. The only device that could have accounted for such sightings was the *Scheinsignalrakete*, but it was unable to reach the altitudes that these items were being seen at. Something strange was going on and it was taking multiple forms: rockets, luminous discs, torpedo-shaped objects and weird lights that followed RAF aircraft. The New Year would bring more of the same, plus new encounters in the shape of mysterious “jets” that clearly weren’t jets.

Chapter 2:

Projectiles, *Komets,* and Flying Wings: RAF Sightings 1944-1945

A reddish glow was seen at the tail of the projectile, which emitted a volume of sparks when making occasionally spurts, following the course of the aircraft closely for 15 to 20 miles…

> - Official report of a "projectile" that followed a bomber on a raid on Frankfurt, March 1944.

1944 arrived and yet the proposed secret weapons believed to be behind the reported sightings in 1942 and 1943 had not materialised. If Germany had managed to construct, develop, test and put into production a surface-to-air missile capable of the manoeuvres witnessed by bomber crews over the *Reich*, then it would have been put into operational service as soon as possible. A system such as this one would have been known to historians, who have researched and described the development of the *Luftwaffe's flak* missiles. None of these projects reached the stage where they could have been able to follow a target so closely, and with such precision. There was also the question of why the mysterious projectiles did not attack the bombers, as this would have surely been their purpose? Building a device capable of such manoeuvres to just provide targeting details for gunners located on the ground, as some officials suggested, appeared improbable. Whilst Allied intelligence staff scratched their heads in search of an answer to the phenomena, the sightings and reports continued.

1944

The first sighting I can find from 1944 occurred not far from where I live in Northumberland. On 2nd January 1944, W/O Able, a trainee

pilot with No.8 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit based at RAF Dyce (now Aberdeen Airport) was flying a Spitfire over the town of Alnwick at 22,000 feet.[120] This was standard practice for pilots who were learning how to fly photographic reconnaissance missions over enemy territory. No.8 (C)OTU had been set up in 1942 for this purpose.[121] Over Alnwick, Able reported seeing four *"huge black triangular objects in the sky."* The source of this story is stated as being the Station Record Book, which would suggest Dyce, the unit's home base, however staff at The National Archives have informed me that no records exist regarding this case in the airfield's file. If true, the case may involve one of the first "black triangle" reports from Britain.

Although the ORBs covering most of the previous night-time cases did not include details of the sightings that were reported, the same cannot be said about F/Lt. Ronald Mortimer's encounter with mystery "rockets" over Halberstadt, situated in the Saxony-Anhalt area of Germany. The ORB for the No.463 Sqdn, Royal Australian Air Force raid on Berlin on the night of 2/3rd January 1944 includes an unusually detailed account of the incident. Keith Chester's *Strange Company* lists the aircraft as a Mosquito[122], which was a smaller twin-engined machine with just two crew. Mortimer was actually flying Lancaster Mk.I LL740/JO-M, and the report is repeated in full here:

"Sortie completed. 10/10ths Strato Cumulus up to 15,000 feet, above that, visibility good owing to starlight. Centre of about seven Red flares/green stars. 21,000 feet. 0248 hours. 1x4000HC. 900x4. 48x30Inc. Some cookies exploding; whole of target lit by fighter flares, etc, but too early for any fires to be seen. Reached target two minutes before zero but not identified until Wanganui flares dropped behind us. Circuited and bombed at zero plus 3. Fighter engaged by gunner at the same time as aircraft was damaged. Damage was attributed to Flak, but bullets in aircraft establish that it must have been caused by fighter (7mm) in head-on attack. Engaged by 2 rockets in vicinity of Halberstadt and later near Hanover, 90 degree

alteration of courses made and definitely established that rockets altered course. Overtook us slowly, appearing with a fiery head and blazing stern on a parallel course. Initial velocity seemed to be fairly great. Duration approx. 1 minute. Disappeared without explosion. Landed at Wittering."[123]

In case anything had been included in the Combat Report which would have been located in a separate file, I checked the relevant records, but they only contain the details relating to F/Lt. Mortimer's rear gunner, who opened fire on a Ju 88 night-fighter with a five second "burst" and scored several "hits" on the enemy aircraft. Nothing is mentioned about the two mysterious "rockets" that were encountered over Halberstadt and Hanover, although since none of the air gunners apparently opened fire on them, this would not be unusual. The crew of Lancaster LL740 was as follows:

F/Lt. Ronald James Mortimer, RAAF Pilot (Captain)
Sgt. H. Everard Flight Engineer
P/O W. J. Baggie, RAAF Navigator
F/Sgt. Ian Cedric Young. RAAF Air Bomber (Bomb Aimer)
P/O L. E. Jackson, RAAF W/T (Radio) Operator/Air Gunner
Sgt. G. Lloyd Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
P/O M. Deane, RAAF Air Gunner (rear gunner)
F/Sgt. C. James Second Pilot

F/Lt. Mortimer had an interesting war before even reaching Bomber Command. Having learnt to fly in South Africa, the vessel transporting him to England in the autumn of 1942 was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat. Along with the other survivors, he spent twelve days in a lifeboat before being rescued. Taking off from RAF Waddington, Lincolnshire at 2318 hours on 2nd January 1944, Mortimer was flying one of just eight Lancasters sent out by No.463 Sqdn to Berlin, two of which returned early due to engine trouble and icing, whilst a third was reported as "missing".

Looking at the reports listed in the ORB for the Berlin raid, it is clear that the city was completely covered with cloud and therefore the Pathfinders had found the target using blind-bombing equipment and had marked it with coloured Target Indicators (the red flares and green stars, or “sky markers”) that were known to the Australian crews as “Wanganui”. These were parachute-retarded, allowing follow-up aircraft from the Main Force to achieve more accurate bomb-aiming when the target was obscured. The cloud cover had also been illuminated by so-called “fighter flares”, dropped by *Luftwaffe* aircraft so that night-fighters, flying at higher altitudes, could clearly see the silhouettes of bombers below them. Of course, these flares were over Berlin, and whilst they could have been the source of some mysterious lights, they did not explain exactly what had been witnessed further west by Mortimer’s crew over Halberstadt. The mention of “cookies” exploding referred to the 4,000lb “Blockbuster” high-capacity bombs which made up a large part of his Lancaster’s payload, the remainder being small incendiary devices.

Apart from the reported manoeuvres, the speeds of the “rockets” themselves were also interesting. Reading between the lines of the ORB report, if these were indeed *flak* rockets, then they seemed to have “throttled back” one reaching the bomber stream’s altitude, especially if they were only just managing to overtake a lumbering Lancaster, one incapable of doing more than 285 mph. Could any German rockets achieve this type of flight profile? The Schmidding 109-543 rocket motor, developed for an anti-aircraft missile type that was in development at that time, was designed with varying amounts of “burn”. Westphälisch-Anhaltische Sprengstoff A. G. (WASAG) fitted two separate solid-fuel elements into the rocket motor’s combustion chamber, the outer main charge comprising a hollow cylinder of their standard propellant, together with an inner cylinder of a much faster-burning compound. As with all solid-fuelled rockets, the inner charge burned first. This provided a thrust of around 150 kg for just five seconds, hopefully ensuring a successful launch and initial climbing phase. The outer charge was the “sustainer”, giving 50 kg thrust for twenty seconds. Liquid-fuelled rockets developed for

surface-to-air missile programmes also possessed varying thrust levels, enabled through a complicated system of altimeters and ram air pressure detectors which adjusted the fuel flow to the combustion chambers, although these were to ensure a constant flight velocity rather than a variable one.

Could a *flak* rocket have been responsible for what F/Lt. Mortimer's crew saw over Germany? Even the combination of launch and sustainer motors could not have allowed a rudimentary *flak* missile to be fired, then search, acquire and follow a Lancaster bomber for an extended period of time. This would have required a rocket motor providing thrust in excess of what was possible in early 1944. In addition, the changes in direction and subsequent parallel course also suggest guidance control that was still well beyond Germany's capability to produce at that time.

Halberstadt, the target for that mission, was home to a subsidiary of the Junkers aircraft company, the plant being reactivated by the Nazis once rearmament began in the 1930s. Halberstädter Flugzeugwerke had constructed its own aircraft during WW1 but was closed as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. During WW2 it built wing sections for the Ju 88, but production moved into caves after damage sustained in raids during late 1944. It is unlikely but not impossible that some secret *flak* missile research was taking place there. The Germans had over fifty different missile projects in varying stages of development during the war, although Junkers was not among the companies involved in designing, building, or testing them. Very few of the missile designs were successfully test flown, and none of the guided surface-to-air types were employed operationally.

Only four of the myriad of surface-to-air missile systems progressed far enough in their development to be capable of both testing and in-flight guidance control manoeuvres. There were also a further pair of air-to-air missile projects which fitted the same criteria. One of the ground-launched designs was subsequently modified, and this new variant became the third air-launched project. However, in January 1944, only three out of the four surface-to-air missile types had seen any kind of launch testing, and it is unclear how

many test rounds, if any, were under actual control at that time. None of these potential *flak* missiles reached the point where they could be considered operational. Details of these projects will be given in a subsequent chapter which examines the technology that was claimed to have been used in projects that the Allies mistook for "Foo Fighters". However, it is reasonable to suggest that barring some secret programme that no-one is aware of, in early 1944 the Germans simply did not possess the capability to successfully launch and control *flak* rockets, especially ones operating at night and under sufficient guidance to copy the violent evasive manoeuvres of RAF bombers or follow them across the sky with any particular accuracy, let alone an interception or parallel course.

Mortimer and his crew (apart from Flight Sergeant James, the "second dickey" on the Berlin raid) failed to return on the night of 24/25th February 1944. During a mission to Schweinfurt, LL740 was attacked by a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter which inflicted severe structural damage on the bomber by cannon fire. The aircraft crashed near Ludwigshafen, killing the pilot and his bomb aimer. Mortimer had ordered the crew to bail out whilst he remained at the controls, trying to keep the aircraft stable long enough for them to do so safely. As far as I am aware, after the war, none of the survivors commented about what they had witnessed during the Berlin raid. It is unlikely that the crew ever saw the follow-up intelligence memo which resulted from their report of the sighting:

"[Mortimer] estimates that one of them was at range of approximately 200 yards at its closest and kept pace at this range with M/463 for 30/40 seconds. He did not fire, in case a hit might detonate it, causing damage to the aircraft at that range."

On 21st January 1944, No.10 Sqdn joined the ever-growing list of RAF bomber units whose crews encountered "rocket-like projectiles" during raids over Germany. F/O E. One of the unit's pilots, P/O E. Burgess, was flying Halifax Mk.II HX172/PB-F that night on a mission to bomb targets at Magdeburg. The ORB entry for his mission includes the following entry:

"Moderate opposition was encountered from Flak batteries, though some rocket-like projectiles were seen."[124]

None of the other Halifax crews from Burgess's unit reported seeing this phenomenon.

On the evening of 28th January 1944, No.23 Sqdn, which was at that time based at Alghero in Sardinia, dispatched five of its de Havilland Mosquito FB.VI fighter-bombers to fly night intruder sorties over the Aviano, Marseille and Montpelier areas. One of the aircraft returned early due to suffering engine trouble, but the other four "Mossies" pressed onto their target zones. All four returned to base without appearing to find anything worth shooting at, as the relevant ORB for January 1944 simply stated, *"no activity"* for the four crews' involved in the night's activities.[125] However, one of the Mosquito crews did encounter "the light".[126] An official report on the incident was sent to Mediterranean Allied Coastal Air Force (MACAF) headquarters. Unfortunately, it has been impossible to work out which of the four No.23 Sqdn Mosquitoes was involved:

"Airborne red light seen dead astern. Mosquito orbited but made no contact. Continued on course and was seen again astern, and was seen several times, but the Mosquito was unable to trace any aircraft."[127]

Mystery "rockets" appeared over Europe not long after the No.23 Sqdn crew had encountered "the light". In the early hours of 29th January, 677 Halifax and Lancaster bombers were heading over Germany to attack targets in Berlin. Cloud cover above the city was reported as broken, allowing ground markers to be used by the Pathfinders. Among the eleven Lancaster Mk.IIIs dispatched by No.49 Sqdn from Fiskerton in Lincolnshire was ND383/EA-E, flown by P/O John ("Jock") Simpson. The aircraft took off at 0031 hours and returned to base at 0825 hours. My copy of the squadron's history, *Beware of the Dog at War: An Operational History of 49*

Squadron, gives no details of the unit's efforts that night beyond a few comments such as *"fires seen for 150 miles on leaving the target"* and *"the best Berlin effort yet!"*[128] Simpson and his crew had only been with the squadron since the end of October 1943 and were as follows:

P/O John Harold Simpson Pilot
Sgt. Robert Henry Mower Flight Engineer
Sgt. Denis Hiscock Navigator
Sgt. B. P. ("Frank") Wheeler Bomb-Aimer
Sgt. Arthur E. Highman W/T Operator (and front gunner)
Sgt. Dennis E. Walker Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
Sgt. Colin Winterborn Air Gunner (rear turret)

The squadron's ORB for the Berlin raid did not include the "rockets" either:

"BERLIN 0327 hours. 21,000 feet. Fifth wave. 9/10ths cloud at 12,000 feet. Red and green stars in sight. Good concentration of fires seen through cloud. Bombing seemed accurate. Excellent route."[129]

The intelligence officer's summary was concise and informative, but was anything was left out? As it turned out, there was plenty. P/O Simpson's debriefing report also included details about a "red ball" that was witnessed following their Lancaster whilst they were flying at 20,500 feet. Thankfully. details were included in a memo which was forwarded to Headquarters, No.5 Group, Bomber Command, later the same day:

"A red ball leaving a trail of yellow/red flames and black smoke, approximately 1,000 feet away at the same height and dead astern. It was closing in. I dived to starboard, and the object followed, appearing to fizzle out and then immediately to reappear. I turned

hard to port, and it followed us round in a tighter turn than we were in. When within 100 yards or less of the aircraft, it fizzled out."[130]

Once more, an RAF aircraft had tangled with an unidentified "ball of fire", one which turned inside their own machine's turning radius. Whilst a fighter could have carried out such a feat, whatever this was, it was not one of the *Luftwaffe's* single-seat fighters out on a *Wilde Sau* ("Wild Boar") mission. In Germany, over the autumn and winter of 1943, two Messerschmitt Bf 109 and Focke-Wulf Fw 190A units started night operations under the *Wilde Sau* concept. Enemy bombers were acquired visually as these single-engined fighters did not have onboard radar equipment fitted, their pilots relying upon illumination from ground-based searchlights or the glow from bomb explosions. It was dangerous, frustrating and mostly fruitless work, but demonstrated just how desperate the *Luftwaffe* were becoming as they failed to square up to the nightly RAF onslaught.

An RAF intelligence report dated 3rd February 1944 included a similar sighting reported by the crew of an unidentified Avro Lancaster from an unknown squadron. From the description, it sounded like it was a slightly more detailed account of P/O Simpson's encounter, but equally could have been another crew who ran into the same object:

"It was a ball of red fire on port side 2 miles away at same height with yellowish red flame coming out behind and black smoke. It was 30/40 mph faster than the Lancaster [which had a top speed of around 285 mph). It went like this for a period of ¾ to 1 minute. It did not explode at any time. Fizzled out and not seen again. The smoke was very black and showed up well against greyish night background. It followed when Lancaster went into a dive and again on corkscrewing. It seemed to go out once but sprang into life again when Lancaster changed from dive to starboard into a corkscrew."[131]

Air Intelligence staff based at No.5 Group, RAF Bomber Command were perplexed by the whole situation. Given the increasing numbers of reports of "rockets" that changed course to follow bombers flying over Germany, they stated that aircrew believed the Nazis had perfected a new kind of *flak* rocket. However, their conclusions were at odds with these beliefs:

"There is no evidence whatever available, nor is it considered practical, that any rocket fired from the ground would be capable of following an aircraft."[132]

Air Vice Marshall Sir Ralph Cochrane, the commanding officer of No.5 Group, believed that the sightings were *"highly improbable".* Cochrane was not alone in finding it hard to accept their stories. Senior officers fell back on enemy secret weapons to explain these events, but senior intelligence staff could not reconcile this with the known level of German missile technology. Despite the lack of official interest and serious investigation into just what was happening in the skies over Europe, aircrew continued to see things they could not understand. It is impossible to say how many kept quiet about their sightings, but some still felt the need to report their encounters with strange phenomenon.

Crews participating in the raid on Leipzig on the night of 19/20th February 1944 experienced unnerving episodes when they reported being chased by guided missiles. No.49 Sqdn's Lancaster Mk.III ND473/EA-O, flown by P/O J. Jones, was reportedly *"chased by some queer sort of rocket shells. Believed to be controlled by radio."*[133] Although the squadron's ORB only includes this single report, according to the published history for the unit, several of the squadron's had encountered such devices around the same time. They believed that the "guided rockets" were fired from *Luftwaffe* night-fighters.[134] Intelligence bulletins described their actual use by day fighters against American bomber formations as early as June 1943.[135] Discussion of the possible use of *Werfer-Granate 21* (Wfr.Gr. 21) rocket shells at night follows later in this chapter,

however it should be stated that such weapons were unguided projectiles, inaccurate and difficult for pilots to aim and launch in the daytime. It is exceedingly unlikely that such devices were ever fired at night and no records exist of their employment in this manner, even under trial conditions.

On the same evening, Wg. Cdr. Wilbur Pleasance, No.419 Sqdn's commanding officer, described seeing *"numerous lights stooging over the sea"* as he crossed the Dutch coast in Halifax Mk.II JP202/VR-T on the way to the target. Another crew, led by W/O Hilmar Eyjolfson, an Icelandic pilot serving with the RAF, saw lights over the Friesian Islands at around the same time. A third crew from the same squadron believed that they were Mosquito night-fighters criss-crossing in front of the bomber formation. Whilst entirely possible, this was unlikely for the same reasons that *Luftwaffe* aircraft did not usually show lights at night, in order to prevent them being detected by the enemy.

Further information was included in *Consolidated Flak Liaison Officer Report No.205*, which listed two points of interest regarding the Leipzig raid of 19/20th February 1944:

"1. Two aircrews provided remarkably similar reports of 'rocket phenomena' in the Leipzig-Berlin area. In each case the projectile was observed flying on a horizontal course and was first seen as a pinpoint of light which rapidly grew into a 'glowing ball' trailing sparks behind it. It appeared to be spinning relatively slowly and very unsteadily, a fact which lends colour to previous reports of similar projectiles having a 'snake-like' motion. The projectiles probably did not approach nearer than half a mile to the observing aircraft; they did not terminate in an explosion but merely lost height and fizzled out. The only difference between the two reports was that in one case the object was described as orange-red and in the other as white. It is unlikely, though this is not established, that both crews observed the same specific occurrence, nor is it known whether the phenomena originated from the ground or the air.

2. Two observations were reported, one near Coblenz and the other a few miles SW of Aachen, of a 'silver cigar-shaped object like an airship', which in the first case was seen at a distance of about 2-3,000 yards from the aircraft, flying on a parallel course at the same height and gradually dropping astern; it appeared to turn in towards the aircraft, passing from starboard to port well astern. In the second case, it was stated that there appeared to be a line of windows along the bottom of the object."[136]

Comparisons were drawn with another strange flying device described as a "meteor projectile", noted in the Aachen area in August 1942. The line of windows seemed similar to the No.77 Sqdn May 1943 sighting where a line of "portholes" was observed. Further mention of strange "airships", this time witnessed during the raid on Schweinfurt on the night of 24th/25th February 1944, appeared in the next bulletin, No.206:

"South-west of St. Quentin, three silver objects about 30 ft long were seen 1,000 ft below and 600 yds astern of the observers. They were described as resembling Zeppelins and, although moving in unison independently of the wind, were apparently not interconnected."

There was also a reference to the Coblenz and Aachen "airships", but this subsequent report was said to provide a much closer view of the objects. However, analysis of the testimony failed to come up with any explanations regarding their nature or purpose.[137]

March 1944 brought no let-up in the number of sightings over Germany, and some of these were included in Consolidated FLO Report No.208. An attack against targets at Stuttgart on the night of 1st/2nd March featured the following:

"A large orange ball was observed to burst at 18,000 feet with considerable brilliance; red, green, white and yellow 'blobs' were then emitted, which quickly merged into a silvery curtain covering a wide area."

The report referenced “silver flakes” and other phenomenon but stopped short of drawing parallels with what some American bomber crews had been witnessing during daylight raids at the time.[138] These sightings will be addressed in Chapter 5.

The evening of 18/19th March 1944 saw another odd report featuring “rockets” carrying out strange manoeuvres. That night, another large force of RAF bombers had been sent out to attack Frankfurt, and near the target, one crew reported seeing a “rocket projectile” which appeared to be fired from the ground. What was noticeable about this particular object was that it reached 22,000 feet and then carried out the following manoeuvres:

“It flew parallel course approximately 200 ft below the aircraft in question. A reddish glow was seen at the tail of the projectile, which emitted a volume of sparks when making occasionally spurts; following the course of the aircraft closely for 15 to 20 miles, it was then seen to cross the track and descend gradually to the ground, where it ultimately exploded with a large orange-yellow flame.”[139]

At this point in the war, the Germans were desperately trying to develop several *flak* rockets. Building one that included the necessary tracking and guidance systems, together with a liquid-fuelled motor capable of allowing a missile to follow a bomber for 15 miles, however, was beyond anything their designers could have come up with at that time. It is not known which squadron was involved in this encounter.

Whilst the focus of strange objects appeared to be centred on northern Europe, and over Germany in particular, RAF aircrew were beginning to fly missions over other parts of Occupied Europe now that Allied forces finally had a foothold in Italy. No.178 Sqdn’s Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers, supplied under Lend-Lease by the Americans, moved from North Africa to Italy in March 1944, bringing them within range of targets in northern Italy, southern Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. At 0025

hours on 13th April, Liberator Mk.VI (the RAF designation for the B-24H) EV841/H took off from Celone airfield, just north of Foggia on the eastern side of Italy. The pilot was F/Sgt. A. L. Steele: he and his crew were bound for the River Danube where their task was to drop mines into the river to disrupt the barge traffic. These missions were carried out frequently by the squadron during this period, and involved flying low along the river, often at heights of just 200 feet above the water, in order that the parachute-retarded mines landed safely and accurately. This was a very hazardous enterprise due to the close proximity of high ground along the river, but even more alarming was the amount of small-arms fire, including heavy machine-guns and 20mm light *flak* weapons, that could be brought to bear on the Liberators at such a low altitude.

However, this mission would be noteworthy for something else. At 0328 hours, when he was flying at just 2,000 feet and prior to the first of two runs along the river, Steele's aircraft was picked up by what was described in the official squadron records as a "blue searchlight" beam, which immediately led to the bomber being fired on by light flak. At the same time, Sgt. F. Cobb and Sgt. R. Davies, his mid-upper and tail gunners, saw what was listed as an *"unidentified single engined aircraft with light in nose."* It followed their Liberator at a distance of about 200 yards but did not open fire. *"Evasive action taken, and aircraft lost."*[140] Lost in the glare of a single light source, it is possible that the gunners would have only seen a light following them and believed that it was an enemy night-fighter, as the bomber had just passed over what they thought was a small landing strip.

We have seen a reference to R. V. Jones, Assistant Director of Intelligence (Science), pointing out in his book *Most Secret War* that RAF bomber crews were reporting seeing single-engined night-fighters with lights fitted in their noses when such aircraft were not actually being used by the Germans. Jones was instrumental in many of the breakthroughs in understanding what the Germans were developing in terms of navigation aids, ground and airborne radar, rockets and missiles, and therefore his view carries weight. As the

engine and propeller took up all of the forward fuselage space in a single-engined fighter, it would have been impossible to install a powerful searchlight, or any light, in its nose. The propeller boss offered almost no space too, and in the case of the Messerschmitt Bf 109, a cannon fired through it. The other question is why would the *Luftwaffe* try something like this? Lights would draw unwanted attention to the aircraft's presence. There is also the question of why a night-fighter pilot would not have opened up at a range of 200 yards, before the bomber pilot had time to react. Whilst it may not have been an early report of a "Foo Fighter" over the Balkans, it is difficult to understand just what the gunners in Sgt. Steele's aircraft actually witnessed on that mission.

During the same mission, the crews of two other Liberators from the same unit, BZ947/N and EV822/V, reported seeing an unidentified aircraft with two red navigation lights showing whilst they were flying over Yugoslavia. In the case of the former, it was stated that no attempt had been made to intercept their aircraft. The crew of Liberator Mk.III BZ932/Y, flown by South African pilot Lt. van der Merwe, spotted what was described as *"a green flare with a bright light and smoke above it – unable to say what it was."* They encountered this at 0145 hours, at around 9,000 feet whilst over Yugoslavia.[141] The possibility that it was a "fighter flare" exists, but bomber crews were familiar with such items, and they did not report seeing any enemy aircraft. Whilst on the face of it, these do not seem to be "Foo Fighter" encounters and may possibly have represented a previously-unknown light installation in the nose of a German single-seat fighter, more compelling reports were yet to come.

Three nights later, No.178 Sqdn had sent its Liberators out to attack marshalling yards in the Budapest area. The crew of BZ930/S had an interesting mission given the number of lights and flares that the pilot, F/Lt. J. H. Lewis, and his six colleagues reported seeing. Just over two hours into the flight, they *"observed an unidentified aircraft with red light in its nose. Seen behind aircraft coming in closer and crossing from port to starboard. Followed aircraft for*

about 20 minutes." [142] Again, an alleged enemy aircraft with an obvious light illuminated, and drawing attention to itself, was "creeping up" on an Allied bomber. This did not make a lot of sense from the Germans' perspective, but what is stranger still is that the Liberator's tail and mid-upper gunners did not open fire on it. However, the distance is not known and the "aircraft" with the red light may have been out of range. Gunners sometimes opened up at around 800 yards although their fire was always more accurate and effective closer in.

That same evening, Wing Commander Donald ("Red") Smythe had taken off from Celone at 2000 in Liberator Mk.III BZ929, also bound for Budapest in order to bomb the marshalling yards and drop packets of propaganda leaflets ("Nickels") over the city. During the outbound flight, he saw a number of *"white lights like small searchlights* [that] *seemed to be tracking aircraft en route."* In addition, *"three red balls were fired into air over target"*, although it is likely that this was simply a reference to small *flak* bursts, as other crews occasionally described them in this fashion.[143] However, another crew from the same unit also noticed the same phenomenon, stating instead that they were *"tracer seen at height of aircraft in the form of 3-4 red balls that hung in the sky."* Tracer rounds were bullets with small pyrotechnics fitted into their bases, which, when fired, allowed gunners to check their aim and compensate if required. The tracks looked like narrow streaks in the sky, not fiery balls, and they did not "hang in the sky". Instead, they burned brightly but briefly, in much the same way as a small meteor does when it burns up in the atmosphere.

Staying in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations, one of No.600 Sqdn's Beaufighter crews saw some strange lights in the Rome area during April 1944. At around 2120 hours on the 16th, F/Lt. G. B. Coleman and his radar operator, Sgt. J. B. Dunsford, took off from Marcianese, north-east of Naples, on a defensive patrol, assisted by their local Ground Control Intercept station "Project". They were on the lookout for "trade", but instead of finding *Luftwaffe* aircraft, Coleman spotted a green light ten miles east of Rome and

no less than *“8 bright white lights on 040° from Rome.”* However, this was not the end of the pilot’s sightings, as later on in the patrol, he reported seeing a *“line of lights”* 15 miles north-west of Anzio at 2220 hours. In addition, Coleman spotted a *“line of lights in shape of ‘U’ at 41°59N, 12°41E, and wedge shaped line of lights to SE.”* It is not known what any of these formations of lights represented. “Project” did not know, as it could not provide any assistance.[144] Something strange was in the air and no-one had an explanation.

No.178 Sqdn crews were reporting some unusual phenomenon in April 1944. On the night of the 17th, their target was the railway marshalling yards at Plovdiv in Bulgaria. At that time, the country was still nominally, if not enthusiastically, a member of the Axis and would not switch sides and declare war on Germany until September of that year. Liberator Mk.VI EV822 took off from Celone at 2035 with Lt. N. E. Hayman at the controls. At around 2330 hours, he made his run in on the target, noticing scattered *“odd marker flares”* that also began to appear behind his aircraft as he did so. There appeared to be no sightings of any other aircraft that could have dropped them. However, these “flares” were not the most unusual item reported on that mission. At 0146 hours, whilst flying around at 12,000 feet, just before crossing over the Adriatic towards south-eastern Italy, Hayman’s crew began to see a series of *“white flashes. Unable to say what they represented but they were regular and irregular. Seemed to be moving relevant to the aircraft.”* Finally, when nearing the coast of Italy, the crew *“observed a red rocket fired from position 10 miles off Peschini.”*[145] BZ929 was being flown by Sqn Ldr Brown on this raid, and his rear gunner witnessed an *“unidentified aircraft with red and white lights on it – above and on starboard quarter.”* Brown carried out a series of evasive manoeuvres and watched flares bursting above his aircraft, at around 15,000 feet. Fighter flares were usually dropped below bombers, so this was a strange and probably unnerving development for the crew involved.

Another innocuous-sounding report was included for the raid on 26th April 1944 operated by No.622 Sqdn, their ORB’s post-mission debriefing summary detailing one of their crews’ experiences on a

raid to Essen: *"Bombed centre of red T.I's at 01.33 from 22,000 ft., heading 190°. Bombing accurate on T.I's and some good fires burning."*[146] However, whilst it was strictly accurate, the report omitted the crew's encounter with four strange projectiles over Germany. The pilot was F/Sgt. Arthur Horton, who had only joined No.622 Sqdn from No.15 Sqdn a few weeks earlier, was only flying his second mission as aircraft captain after his posting. Both squadrons shared the same airfield, RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk (still a USAF airbase today), with No.622 Sqdn being formed in August 1943 by renaming "C" Flight, No.15 Sqdn and then adding additional aircraft and crews. By December, the new unit had exchanged its obsolete Stirling Mk.IIIs for Lancaster Mk.IIIs, and on the night of 26/27th April 1944, Horton was flying LM477/GI-L to Essen along with another sixteen bombers from the same squadron. The aircraft's crew were as follows:

F/Sgt. Arthur Horton Pilot
Sgt. David C. Parsons Flight Engineer
F/Lt. Arthur Nicholl, RCAF Navigator
Sgt. W. ("Jock") White W/T operator (& front gunner)
F/Sgt. Brian L. Gray, RAAF Bomb-Aimer
Sgt. Bernard G. Dye Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
Sgt. Brian Grant Air Gunner (rear turret)

I first read about F/Sgt. Horton's sighting in Martyn R. Ford-Jones' *Bomber Squadron: Men Who Flew With XV* back in 1987. The sighting of strange objects is not the only incident omitted from the ORB quoted above, as during the flight, one of the gunners, Sgt. Bernard Dye, opened fire on a twin-engined Messerschmitt Bf 110G night-fighter that got too close to their Lancaster. Horton gave details of the encounter with the rockets, which occurred as he and his crew were making for home:

"Suddenly, we were attacked by what appeared to be four stubby-winged rocket projectiles. I did not know what they were or what they

*contained and told the gunners not to open fire in case they exploded. Whatever manoeuvre I put the aircraft through, the projectiles followed. One of them disappeared, but for at least fifty miles, out of France and over the coast, I put the Lancaster through twists and turns that it was never designed to do. The throttles were through the 'gate' and over that fifty miles we lost some 14,000 feet of height. 'What about the engines, Dave?', I asked, concerned we were not supposed to run them at full bore for more than three minutes. His typical and laconic reply filtered back through my headphones, 'F*** the engines.' The aircraft was vibrating and shaking due to the speed which must have reached 300 mph. Shortly after crossing the coast, the projectiles lost speed and fell away out of sight, much to our relief. Once again, the Horton luck had held, and we landed at Tuddenham near Mildenhall."*[147]

The credence attached to this sighting is much improved due to testimony from Horton's mid-upper turret gunner, Bernard Dye. He reported that the four objects had a "fire-like glow", together with sparks coming out of their tails, and resembled "large oranges", the same size as footballs. Researcher Andy Roberts obtained more details from both Horton and Dye about the incident. The pilot told Roberts that his gunners reported that they were either being followed or chased by the four orange glows, and that these were travelling extremely fast and gaining on their Lancaster:

"I, of course, immediately 'dropped' the aircraft out of the sky, my gunners did not know what they were – should they fire? By this time I was standing the aircraft on its tail and beginning a series of corkscrews and turns, with the things following everything I did, but making no move to attack us. By this time, we had the throttles 'through the gate', the gunners still asking us what they should do."

The standard evasion technique for a Lancaster pilot with a night-fighter on his tail was to enter into a "corkscrew" manoeuvre. Depending on which side the enemy aircraft was approaching from,

the bomber would be suddenly thrown into a series of violent course and altitude changes, diving whilst turning right or left, the turns being reversed before pulling out and climbing steeply with turns in the opposite direction. In a dive, a Lancaster could reach 300 mph or so, and during the climb, its speed would fall away rapidly, hopefully ensuring that the much faster *Luftwaffe* night-fighter would overshoot its target. The process would be repeated as many times as required in order to shake off the enemy aircraft. On most occasions the procedure worked. However, in Horton's case, the four mysterious projectiles "stuck to his aircraft like glue".

The mention of pushing the throttles "through the gate" referred to the standard practice of wiggling the throttle levers for the Lancaster's four Rolls-Royce Merlin engines to one side and then forwards, breaking a thin wire known as a "gate". The fully forward throttle lever position for a Merlin Mk.24 engine was +14lbs/square inch of boost, whereas "through the gate" gave +18. This ensured extra power during take-off whilst under maximum loading, and also during combat, although only for short periods of time. The pilot, assisted by his Flight Engineer, would push the throttle levers forward together in order to squeeze the last drops of power from the engines. During their attempts to evade the projectiles, Horton inflicted serious damage to the aircraft's engines, although they still managed to land safely at another base just a few miles south of their home airfield.

F/Sgt. Horton rapidly concluded that ordering his gunners to fire on the objects would invite disaster:

"One of the glows faded out and disappeared. By this time, most of the crew, except me and the bomb-aimer [F/Sgt. Gray] had seen the 'things'. The remaining three stayed with us, duplicating our every move, until we had crossed the coast and were heading out to sea. The episode lasted about ten minutes."

For whatever reason, the mysterious objects gave up the chase at this point. *"We were at 6,000 feet when they disappeared. According to my gunners they simply 'faded out'."* Once they were back at their

own airfield, Horton and his crew provided the squadron intelligence officer with details of the encounter. Rather than take their report seriously, the crew were subjected to derision and ridicule. However, as W/O Lever's crew had done, they refused to budge from their story. Both the pilot and his mid-upper gunner made entries in their logbooks regarding the "rockets". They seem to be the only records that were made of the incident at the time.

"Stubby-winged project projectiles" were definitely being designed in Germany at around the time of Arthur Horton's encounter, and the Messerschmitt *Enzian* ("Gentian") matched the description extremely well. However, in April 1944 the completed missiles still had not received their specially-designed Walter liquid-fuelled rocket engines, so initial flight tests were performed using small rocket-assisted take-off units that were normally fitted to overloaded aircraft and jettisoned shortly after departure. Clearly even a *Enzian* test missile would not have been able to fly for fifty miles using the limited amount of propellant carried in these boosters. A more complete description of this *flak* rocket, plus its relevance to more advanced weapons that were claimed to be the source of the "Foo Fighter" reports, is provided in Chapter 13.

It is likely that the overall layout of *Enzian* was strongly influenced by another Messerschmitt design, the Me 163 *Komet* designed by Alexander Lippisch. This stubby, tailless aircraft with swept-back wings was a rocket-powered interceptor capable of astonishing speeds and rates of climb. However, it too suffered from a lack of endurance (and therefore range) so could not have chased a Lancaster bomber fifty miles across Europe one night in April 1944. The Me 163 carried less than eight minutes' worth of fuel. It was essentially a point-defence interceptor and could not operate away from its base due to the special fuels required to power its Walter rocket motor. In addition, *Komets* were not in operational service at that time and in any case, they were almost too dangerous to be flown during the daytime, never mind at night. No night-time operations were ever flown by Me 163s, despite several reports to the contrary made by RAF bomber crews, which will feature in subsequent cases. Mano Ziegler, a test pilot who flew Me 163s in

1944, recalled a conversation he had one night with colleagues whilst watching a bomber raid pass overhead:

"'Someone ought to climb up there in an Me 163 and put an end to this cat-and-mouse game,' one of our number muttered. 'Trying to land in the dark, you'd spread yourself in small pieces around the countryside!'" [148]

In Italy, crews belonging to No.178 Sqdn continued to see lights they could not explain. South African pilot Lt. van der Merwe was piloting Liberator BZ946 in the early hours of 28th April 1944, bound for initially for Bologna to release packets of "Nickels" before flying to Genoa where industrial targets would be attacked. At 0134 hours, shortly after dropping leaflets on Modena, the crew of the Liberator were about 10 miles north of Reggio at an altitude of 13,000 feet when they noticed a series of very strange light formations. The ORB describes these in surprising detail.

"Observed chain of bright white lights about three miles long running from East to West with white intersections at top, bottom and two together towards Westerly end, each about half a mile long. Two branches of red lights at 30° to main chain on either side about one third of way from Westerly end. Lights spaced about 300 yards apart. Lights were extinguished after Liberator had passed and illuminated again after about two minutes." [149]

It is not clear from the ORB if van der Merwe's crew reported the lights were on the ground or in the air. One possible explanation could be that they were road convoys, with the red and white lights being headlights and taillights, although the *"Kettenhunde"* [150] of the *Feldgendarmerie* (German military police) would have ensured that *Wehrmacht* vehicles followed strict night-driving rules. Most, if not all military vehicles were fitted with hoods over their headlights or covers that only allowed a small amount of light through and were not visible at all from above a certain height.[151] Even if some

vehicles had defective hoods or covers, it is unlikely that a convoy would have displayed such poor night discipline. Showing lights at night was tantamount to inviting Allied intruder pilots to attack them. In any case, the sheer number of lights and their strange layout is certainly baffling. Road convoys were certainly seen by pilots from the squadron over Hungary in May 1944, but in these cases, aircraft were only flying at a couple of hundred feet altitude whilst on river mining missions, so their crews would have been more able to spot such movements.[152]

Another Beaufighter crew from No.600 Sqdn encountered “the Light” over Anzio in Italy on 30th April 1944. Details of this incident are however scarce, although it is believed to have occurred at around 2100 hours on the last day of the month. The pilot and his navigator/radar operator witnessed an “orange-red glow” that followed them. It was not picked up on the latter’s Airborne Intercept Mk.IV radar set, nor the Ground Control Intercept station that would vector them onto any potential targets. The pilot’s evasive manoeuvres did not shake off whatever was generating the light, even when he flew into cloud in an attempt to lose it. Finally, he dived his aircraft headlong into another cloudbank and when he emerged into clear skies again, it had disappeared. The squadron ORB for April 1944 gives details of eight missions that occurred that day, of which three were flown at the time associated with the report. [153] Nothing is mentioned in the three reports about an encounter with anything strange, nor in the other official file for the month[154], although this would not have been unusual at that time. The only history of the squadron in book form devotes just two lines to April 1944, and not surprisingly this case does not feature.[155] What details exist apparently come from the (unknown) pilot’s logbook, given to the researcher Andy Roberts.

At 0112 hours on 1st May 1944, No.178 Sqdn Liberator EW106 was flying a few miles north-east of Bologna in northern Italy, bound for Genoa. The aircraft was being flown by another South African pilot in the squadron, Lt. T. E. Knight. He was at an altitude of around 14,000 feet when the crew suddenly witnessed an unidentified

aircraft *“with [a] small yellow light on top.”* A second unidentified aircraft with red and white lights was also seen over the target area. [156] If the pilots of night-fighters were flying around with navigation lights on, it would advertise their presence to the watchful gunners onboard their potential targets. Whilst these were not definite “balls of fire” sightings, such events suggested strange tactics on behalf of the enemy, if indeed they were actually his aircraft. It is probable that anything flying around in the dark which didn’t look like a “rocket” was simply described as an “aircraft”, especially a moving light. However, it is also likely that only the light itself was noticed, considering the usual details such as “single-engined” or “twin-engined” are missing from the mission report contained in the ORB.

Several suspected enemy aircraft, all but one displaying single white lights, were spotted by crews from No.37 Sqdn flying a mission to Bucharest on the night of 6th May 1944. Again, it seems odd that enemy night-fighters were lurking in the dark, looking for targets when at the same time they were showing bright lights themselves. The phenomenon was clearly noteworthy enough to appear in the squadron’s summary of events for the month, and not the individual mission logs as usual.[157]

There were a lot of South African pilots serving in No.178 Sqdn, and another one was flying one of the unit’s Liberators on a mission to bomb an industrial area at Bucharest in the early hours of 8th May 1944. Lt. J. F. Young was piloting BZ928 and had taken off from Celone at 2045 the previous evening, and his bomb aimer had dropped their twelve 500lb bombs on the target at midnight. About five minutes later, as Young was leaving the drop zone, flying at around 12,000 feet, his crew noticed *“an unidentified single-engined aircraft.”* We have already examined *Wilde Sau* operations as a possible explanation for these sightings. The concept was discontinued in the spring of 1944 due to the attrition rate for home-defence pilots being simply too high to sustain, as skilled fighter pilots were badly needed to combat the American daylight offensive as well. In any case, these missions were not carried out over Romania. However, whilst a *Wilde Sau* fighter attack might not have

seemed too out of the ordinary, what happened next suggested this was definitely not the explanation.

"At first crew thought it was a flare as it had a yellowish light on it. Flew parallel at first and turned and attacked from below on starboard by climbing rapidly and at a distance of 300/400 yards it stood on its tail and fired what was, no doubt, a rocket projectile – a yellow orangey colour. Enemy aircraft then climbed away. Evasive action taken. The rocket was seen to split up into five red kind of pokers which fell towards the ground."[158]

At no time during the apparent engagement was the "aircraft" identified, nor did Young's gunners seem to fire on it. Whatever this object was, it was flying a strange attack profile, running parallel to the Liberator before turning, diving and them firing some sort of "rocket" at the bomber. This did not appear to be a very successful weapon, either, since it was observed to break up into several pieces before falling away. About a year earlier, the *Luftwaffe* had introduced an airborne mortar shell for use by *Zerstörer* ("Destroyer") units, equipped with larger twin-engined fighters such as the Messerschmitt Bf 110 and Me 210, plus single-engined fighters such as the Fw 190. This was the Rheinmetall-Borsig *Werfer-Granate 21* rocket mortar, a standard 210mm *Nebelwerfer* rocket artillery shell adapted for air launching. However, aiming and launching the weapon was difficult enough in the daylight, as the rocket tubes were fitted at an angle to the wings of the aircraft carrying them. Trying to attack a bomber at night with few points of visible reference would have been an impossible feat, and there are no records of any *Nachtjagdgeschwaderen* using the rocket.

However, some of the IAR 81C single-seat fighters belonging to the *Aeronautica Regala Romana* (ARR, or "Royal Romanian Air Force") were fitted with Wfr.Gr. 21 launchers in 1943 for the defence of the Ploesti oilfields and may have retained stocks of shells into 1944. The ARR did have a single night-fighter unit, *Escadrila 51 Vânătoare*, which was also referred to as the *Luftwaffe's* 12./NJG 6.

However, it received 18 Bf 110s from Germany and did not operate the IAR 81.[159] The Romanian Bf 110s were not equipped with Wfr.Gr. 21 launchers either. Neither were aircraft from the two *Luftwaffe Staffeln* comprising IV./NJG 6 which were based in Romania, which also flew the Bf 110G-4.[160] None of the other crews from No.178 Sqdn reported seeing a similar phenomenon that night. Had some enterprising ARR IAR 81 pilot decided to carry out a freelance night-time mission in his aircraft, but the rocket mortar had failed when he fired it? Or was something else in the skies over Romania that night?

Further north, bomber crews from British bases were also seeing mystery rocket projectiles and much closer to home. On the night of 10/11th May, aircraft from No.300 Sqdn, another of the Polish-crewed units based in Lincolnshire, sent its newly-acquired Lancaster Mk.IIIs against the coastal artillery batteries at Dieppe in northern France. LL857/BH-B, piloted by F/Sgt. Józef Nalepa, had overflown the target at around 11,000 feet. His crew saw what were described in the squadron's ORB as *"rocket projectiles (believed), dying out well below aircraft."*[161] Whatever these strange objects were, they did not seriously threaten the Polish-crewed Lancaster bomber.

The commanding officer of No.300 Sqdn encountered another "rocket" in the early hours of 22nd May 1944. At 0121 that morning, Lancaster Mk.III LM487/BN-J, flown by Wg Cdr Teofil Pozyczka, was at around 23,000 feet and over the target of Duisburg. The Polish officer had taken charge of the unit just seven weeks beforehand. In conditions of moderate visibility, and at the time of bomb release, *"a yellowish air fired rocket proceeded horizontally 2,000 feet below* [their aircraft]*, then disappearing in the cloud."* No night-fighters were seen at the time which could have been responsible for this supposed weapon. This sighting is extremely interesting. As a squadron commander of reasonably high rank in the RAF, Pozyczka would not have indulged in flights of fancy. Given his status, it is also likely that he submitted a report to Bomber Command's No.1 Group

Headquarters, although this has not been located. The Wg Cdr's sighting was not the only one from No.300 Sqdn that night, however.

A more alarming report was filed by Józef Nalepa's crew, who had already seen a "projectile" earlier that month. According to the ORB, the following occurred:

"At 0122 hours when flying at 20,000 feet, a red rocket travelling horizontally in a series of zig-zags towards aircraft, 500 feet below. Rocket burned out 500 yards distant and disappeared in cloud."[162]

The "zig-zags" suggest that the mysterious projectile was under some kind of intelligent control. It is likely that the crew and their intelligence officers back at RAF Faldingworth believed that this was some kind of German secret weapon, as they would have had no other frame of reference to describe it as. However, given that no operational *flak* rocket types were ever in service with the *Luftwaffe* during WW2, the exact nature of this object was uncertain. Could it have been a test round, using an RAF bomber as a live target? This is of course possible, but the histories of the various guided *flak* missile projects do not mention test launches using enemy aircraft as practice targets. Guidance systems were in their infancy and the Germans did not completely solve the numerous problems that existed in perfecting such devices.

Wg Cdr Pozyczka and F/Sgt. Nalepa were not alone in seeing rockets that night either. F/Sgt. J. Koziolek was flying Lancaster Mk.I "BH-P" on the raid to Duisburg. Another coloured projectile, this time a white one, *"travelling horizontally, followed aircraft 50 feet above and 500 yards to port for about four minutes, despite evasive action. Rocket finally burned out and disappeared in cloud."*[163] Again, it appeared as though this object was under some sort of control as it kept pace with Koziolek's bomber. This was a classic "Foo Fighter" case, involving something that maintained station on an aircraft and did not move from that position, despite all attempts to shake it off. If it was some unknown type of German *flak* rocket, then it managed to keep a level course at a fixed distance from its target, even during

some violent manoeuvring, and for several minutes, quite a feat for 1944 for an experimental missile. What was more, these sightings were taking place months before what has traditionally been regarded as the start of the “Foo Fighter” phenomenon.

A fourth crew from No.300 Sqdn also had an encounter with something that resembled a “white rocket” during the same raid. This object also followed a Lancaster, LL807/BH-N being piloted by F/O Jerzy Rozanski. At 0150 hours, about twenty-five minutes after dropping their bombs on Duisburg, the crew were at 22,000 feet and returning home when they spotted a *“white rocket projectile with a comet tail, travelling horizontally.”* It followed them for three minutes and then “burst” around 2,000 feet below their aircraft. Although the Polish crew suspected that an explosion had occurred, *“no blast was felt.”*[164] Rozanski and his entire crew were killed the following month when their bomber was shot down by a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter on a mission to Gelsenkirchen.

No.300 Sqdn’s crews were still reporting sightings of strange rockets in May 1944. F/Sgt Koziolek and his crew encountered another one on the following evening’s operation, this time a raid on Dortmund. At 0121 hours on the 23rd, on the final run-in to the target and a minute before bomb release, they saw *“a yellowish-white rocket travelling horizontally towards [their] aircraft from port to starboard and at the same height.”* Both bomber and object were at 21,000 feet. The pilot reduced speed suddenly and the “rocket” appeared to overshoot, passing below and then out of sight.[165]

F/Lt. Lewis, the No.178 pilot who had encountered an aircraft with a red light in its nose the month before, was promoted to Sqn Ldr prior to another sighting in May 1944. However, this event mirrored that of his subordinate F/Lt. Young’s just over a fortnight beforehand. The squadron had sent its Liberators out to attack Valmontone, about 40km north-west of Rome. This was in support of Operation Buffalo, the push north from the Anzio beachhead. Intelligence suspected that Valmontone was garrisoned by the Germans and so it was bombed. Sqn Ldr Lewis took off from Celone at 2310 hours on the 23rd and carried out a dummy run the target at around 0100 on

the 24th before going around again. At about 0115, just after the bombs had been released, and when they were at around 7,000 feet, Lewis witnessed *"a yellow ball of fire pass over [his] aircraft with smoke trail. Possibly a rocket projectile."* The Sqn Ldr was sure where it had come from. *"Certainly fired from air and not from ground."* Again, one of the squadron's crews had seen something they felt to be a rocket that was either fired or passed close to their aircraft. As a flight commander, Lewis was experienced and presumably would not have mistaken a flare for a possible projectile. [166] His was not the only crew to have encountered a "ball of fire" on the same mission. Lt. G. C. Gibson, flying EV822, also recorded seeing a *"large ball of fire"* at 6,000 feet at about the same time:

"Seen to travel forward and dive straight into the ground. Burnt for a long period."

Was there a much more mundane explanation for this multiple sighting? The crew of Liberator BZ947 watched a Wellington go down in flames over the target after being attacked by what they thought was a single-engined fighter. As it hit the ground, a "ball of fire" flew off, accompanied by red and green lights.[167] These were presumably marker flares "cooking off" in the resulting explosion. Flares burning on the ground could not have reached 7,000 feet, however, so sightings by the other crews remain unexplained.

The No.178 Sqdn reports kept coming in. In the early hours of the morning of the 27th, the crew of Liberator Mk.VI EW139/P were returning from a raid on the road communications net in and around Viterbo, about 50km north-west of Rome. F/Lt. D. A. Eardley reported the following:

"An unusual sight was seen over target area – a long red pear shaped object with what seemed to be balloon cables coming from it, 7-8,000 ft. Was seen on two occasions."

The sightings came just after midnight.[168] A German *Sperrballon* ("barrage balloon") would have certainly looked somewhat "pear-shaped", although its fabric was normally grey or a dirty white in colour, not red. The possibility that this was in fact an escaped observation or barrage balloon cannot be discounted, although none of the other crews in No.178 Sqdn reported seeing it. The fact that a potential target only had one barrage balloon in place was also rather strange.

Back in northern Europe, the Polish crews belonging to No.300 Sqdn were continuing their own series of private engagements with "rockets". At 0237 hours on the morning of the 28th, F/O M. Burkiewicz and his crew in Lancaster LL779/BH-L had just bombed the railway marshalling yards at Aachen in western Germany. They were flying at 12,000 feet when they spotted *"many white rockets travelling horizontally at 10,000 feet."* The crew believed that they were an enemy weapon but could not determine if the "rockets" were fired from the ground or mid-air.[169] Burkiewicz's crew was not the first one from the squadron to report seeing this phenomenon, as another entry in the unit's ORB confirms. At 0224 hours that morning, F/Sgt. W. Fudali, flying Lancaster Mk.I LL804/BN-F at 18,000 feet away from the target area, encountered *"a single white rocket with comet tail."* Again, the crew could not work out whether it was ground or air-launched, but it was *"seen approaching aircraft from starboard at same height."* Fudali pulled his Lancaster into a steep climb to avoid the suspected *flak* rocket, watching as it passed underneath and then disappeared.[170]

A third crew from the same squadron had a similar encounter to Fudali on the same mission. At 0255 hours, thirty minutes after releasing their bombs over Aachen, F/Sgt. J. Danieluk witnessed a *"very bright orange rocket with a comet tail."* He believed it had been fired from the ground, and it soon reached his altitude of 14,000 feet, only to fly horizontally and parallel to his bomber. The pilot believed that it provided *"a high degree of illumination of the surrounding area."* As with the other reports, Danieluk watched as it seemed to burn out and then disappear.[171] Rockets fired from the ground

almost certainly would have followed a ballistic course unless controlled in some fashion. Even so, to approach a bomber with reasonable accuracy as these Polish reports from May 1944 indicate, suggested that the Germans had access to a much more advanced level of guidance system technology than they actually had at that time.

Another of the No.205 Group squadrons based in Italy at this time was No.150, which flew the Vickers Wellington Mk.X. On the evening of the 29th, the unit sent its serviceable bombers against the *Luftwaffe* airfield at Feuersbrunn, about 40km north-west of Vienna. The day fighter units based there were posing a very real threat to American daylight bombers attacking targets in southern Germany, Austria and Hungary from their Italian bases. F/Sgt. J. F. Crombie was piloting LN385 on this mission, and during the raid encountered what was described in the ORB as *"rocket type defences"* over the target. Lt. Kirkland, a South African pilot flying with the same squadron, also reported seeing a "rocket" in the same area during the sortie to Austria. F/Sgt. D. B. Tweedie in Wellington HZ713, F/O D. White in LN353 and F/Sgt E. Mattingley in LN648 all stated that they had seen *"red rocket defences"* over Feuersbrunn. W/O R. L. Sedger, flying LN792, reported that his crew had witnessed two separate rockets in the target area.[172] The bombers were flying at altitudes in excess of 8,000 feet during their attacks and therefore would presumably have been well above any German decoy rockets that could have been fired. Feuersbrunn would be the location of further strange reports later in the year.

A crew from No.272 Sqdn reported seeing a strange red light in early June 1944, one that chased after their aircraft. F/O Eric Myring was a 26-year old veteran of the Italian campaign, flying Beaufighter Mk.X aircraft on attacks against coastal shipping, port facilities and "targets of opportunity". When the former pilot finally gave details of his encounter after the war, he could not remember the exact date, but believed it was either the 2nd, 5th or 8th June. At about midnight, Myring and his navigator, F/O Tom Corlett, were in Beaufighter Mk.X JM402/E over the main road linking Florence and Rome, looking for

vehicle convoys to “shoot up”. He was flying at around 4,000 feet, under a clear moonlit sky.

Suddenly, a thousand feet below them, the crew suddenly saw a very bright red light. They initially believed they were seeing another aircraft, perhaps one of their squadron that had also departed their Alghero base that night. However, the light then proceeded to latch onto Myring’s tail and chase them through the Italian skies for the following five or ten minutes. The pilot instinctively threw his Beaufighter into a series of manoeuvres designed to throw off his pursuer, but whichever direction he headed in, he was tracked by the red light. Myring could not help notice that after a while, it kept a constant distance from his aircraft, despite his attempts to lose it. The “shadower” was so persistent that the crew thought it was equipped with a highly advanced radar system, so easily and accurately it was able to follow them. However, Eric Myring was a skilled pilot, experienced in low-level flying, and he was piloting the powerful Beaufighter, which was a highly-manoeuvrable fighter-bomber, despite its size. Flying along a series of valleys at low altitude, the pursuer was finally shaken off or had decided to abandon the chase.

Landing back at Alghero, Myring and Corlett reported their encounter to the intelligence officer, a young man filling in for the normal staff member. The officer told them that he could not register it as a plane and decided to fill in a report stated that they had indeed been followed by “a red light”. The incident was soon forgotten in the maelstrom of stressful missions that followed over the next few months.[173] Eric Myring only decided to recount his sighting long after the war was over.

The No.272 Sqdn ORB certainly confirms that Myring and Corlett were flying missions over Italy on each of the dates stated. However, there is no mention of any red lights on any of the three days listed, which involved the crew flying in the general area described in the pilot’s recollections and on the task mentioned.[174] Beaufighters being followed by lights would become more commonly associated with the American 415th Night-Fighter Sqdn, which flew the same

type over western Germany in late 1944/early 1945, but this report confirms that RAF crews were coming into contact with the same phenomenon, and much earlier.

Back over the Balkans, No.142 Sqdn's aircrew were now also reporting strange rockets. On the night of 16/17th June, eight of the unit's Wellingtons were dispatched against the marshalling yards at Timişoara. The crews of F/Lt. J. King and Captain van der Westhuizen, a South African pilot, both reported seeing *"surface to air rockets"* being fired at them over Yugoslavia. King was flying LN700/QT-R and reported *"air rocket seen S of Belgrade"*, whilst van der Westhuizen in aircraft "U" (serial unknown) saw *"several rockets on [the] return trip."*[175] Once again, aircrew were seeing strange rockets coming at them, and in locations far removed from any of the known testing areas in Germany.

June 1944 saw no end to the sightings reported by the crews of No.178 Sqdn.[176] The unit sent its bombers out on the evening of the 25th to attack the Shell Koolaz oil refinery at Budapest, with all of its aircraft airborne by 2100 hours. Lt. T. E. Knight was flying EW106 again, and bombs were dropped on the target just after midnight. Numerous "Scarecrows" were reported between 0017 and 0030 hours on the way out of the target area, although these were almost certainly exploding aircraft, having been hit in their bomb bays by *flak* bursts. "Flaming Onions" were definitely reported by other crews, but these were effectively the same thing. A couple of minutes after seeing the last one, at around 14,000 feet, Knight's crew witnessed *"one rocket seen converging on aircraft at same height. Finally burnt out about 800 yards on starboard beam of aircraft."*[177]

Again, it is important to point out here that although the Germans were developing several guided surface-to-air missiles, none of these were ever deployed operationally, and the testing grounds were located further north in Germany itself. These projects will be discussed in future chapters. According to a USAAF Air Intelligence document dated 19th January 1945, officials and experts believed that no German surface-to-air missiles had been put in service by that stage:

"No intelligence has been received which would confirm the frequent reports from aircrews regarding high-altitude flak rockets, and it is thought that a large proportion of such reports is in fact attributable to observations of the after-effects of smoke markers. If a high-altitude rocket does exist, experience so far suggest that very considerable improvement in performance will be required before it constitutes a serious menace to bomber formations."[178]

However, smoke markers, even if they could be fired to altitudes of above 20,000 feet, were not able to move very quickly through the air, nor "follow" bombers as they flew towards their targets. Clearly something else was going on in the night skies over Occupied Europe.

One German weapon that came close to combat readiness, however, was the EMW *Taifun* ("Typhoon"). A small surface-to-air missile propelled by a liquid-fuelled rocket motor, it was designed to travel at 3,000 feet per second and reach an altitude of 50,000 feet. Production began in January 1945 but only around 600 had been finished before the end of the war and none were ever launched operationally. There was also political resistance towards plans for large-scale construction of *Taifun*.[179] As it was ground-launched, the missile would have been noticed rising up from the surface. *Taifun* was also unguided, as it was designed to be cheaply and quickly produced, and there was not enough space in the missile to fit a guidance system. In addition, its flight profile does not match reports of strange rockets noted over the Balkans or indeed elsewhere over Europe. It is therefore difficult to understand what type of projectile F/Lt. Knight and his fellow pilots saw over Hungary.

Lt. Knight also witnessed a strange red light on the morning of the 29th, whilst flying a mission to Giurgiu in Romania. It was noticed at the same altitude, and it *"burst into 3 red balls which exploded like AA bursts."* However, Lt. J. H. Hosken, flying Liberator EV822/V on the same raid, saw a *"ball of yellow fire in sky, which fell to ground in several pieces."* This may well have been an exploding aircraft. What

was stranger still was the pilot's report of *"a rocket seen at approximately 15-20,000 ft – nothing else followed."* During the same raid, one of the unit's flight commanders, Sqn Ldr Lewis, also saw what he described as *"air fired rockets"*. A few isolated occurrences of *flak* rockets being tested over Germany was one thing, but multiple reports of them over Austria, Hungary and Romania was something else entirely. Either the *Luftwaffe* had somehow managed to install operational SAM batteries all over the Balkans or had fitted rocket mortars to night-fighters based there without post-war historians becoming aware of their secret deployment, or something else entirely was going on.

They were not the only No.178 Sqdn pilots to have noticed the "rockets" that night. F/Lt. K. Travena, flying KG835, was flying at 13,000 feet on the run-in to the target area at about 0146 hours. His crew reported seeing a *"red flaming rocket fired direct at aircraft from single-engined aircraft from starboard at approx. 200 yards range. Pilot immediately took evasive action by pulling nose up and turning to starboard."* It was also witnessed by Lt. van der Merwe, who reported that it was *"fired horizontally"*.[180] This appeared to be a carbon-copy of the incident that occurred on 8th May 1944. Despite the mention of the "single-engined aircraft", it is not entirely clear what the squadron had encountered in the night skies over Romania, as these types of night-fighters, especially ones on *Wilde* Sau-type flights carrying air-to-air rocket mortars, were not based in the country. Another crew witnessed a suspected aircraft with two white lights in its nose.

No.178 Sqdn was clearly something of a rocket "magnet" in June 1944. On the last day of the month, Sqn Ldr Lewis encountered this phenomenon on no less than two separate occasions on a night mission to attack the *Luftwaffe* airfield at Feuersbrunn. The first involved *"air to air rocket firing seen as aircraft left Graz"*, and the second happened in the Wiener Neustadt/Vienna area. It is not clear whether these rockets were actually aimed at Lewis's Liberator or not. The report was corroborated by Sgt. Carnook, who was flying EW264 on the same raid. He also reported seeing a "rocket". A

single-seat Fw 190 was noted by a different crew over the target area, as was a *"Me 109, silver-coloured".* [181] Both of these types could carry single Wfr.Gr. 21 launchers under each wing. However, silver was a strange colour-scheme for a *Luftwaffe* fighter flying daylight operations, let alone a night-fighter. It is possible that the aircraft had yet to be painted although a highly-visible, reflective machine would have presumably been a liability for night-fighter operations. What is more puzzling is the Wfr.Gr. 21 rocket mortar's potential employment during the hours of darkness, as no evidence of its use against the RAF's night bomber fleet has been found. In addition, the weapon used a timed fuse to detonate its 90lb (40kg) warhead at a pre-set range, usually between 600 and 1200m from the launch aircraft. The reports of "rockets" do not include the explosions that resulted when a Wfr.Gr. 21 round detonated. Either the crews were not witnessing their demise, the mortar rounds were faulty or launched without warheads, or something else entirely was being seen during these missions. Ockham's Razor would probably suggest that these objects were Wfr.Gr. 21s but historians who have made in-depth studies into *Luftwaffe* operations cannot find evidence of their use at night.

Reports of single-seater fighters with lights in their noses continued into July 1944. No.614 Sqdn sent its Halifax Mk.II bombers out from Stomara aerodrome, in the Foggia complex in Italy, against a range of targets across the Balkans on the night of the 1st/2nd. Not all of the crews carried bombs. One of the squadron's aircraft, JP275, flown by F/Lt. W. M. Carrington, was detailed to drop propaganda leaflets on Athens. About fifteen miles west of Lake Iliki, itself north-west of the Greek capital, Carrington and his own crew spotted what was described as *"an unidentified aircraft with orange nose light made orbit and lost aircraft."* This was later identified as a single-seat Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter at around 11,000 feet and 600 yards away, fitted with a nose light which was soon extinguished.[182] I have some questions regarding this description, which is listed in the ORB. Firstly, none of the *Luftwaffe's* night-fighter units were based in Greece. The description of a single-

seat fighter suggests a *Wilde Sau* unit, although it does not appear that any of these particular operations were flown over the country. It would also have been highly unusual for a day fighter pilot to undertake such missions without the proper training. The second problem lies with the aircraft itself. There was simply no available room in the nose of a Bf 109 to fit any kind of light. Late model Bf 109Gs had barely enough room in the forward fuselage to fit two MG 131 machine-guns in addition to the Daimler-Benz DB605 engine. In fact, the weapons' large breech blocks forced the aircraft designer to add prominent blisters in the upper skin of the fuselage, just forward of the cockpit, in order to accommodate them. The propeller was obviously installed in the extreme nose of the fighter, but there was no room in the propeller boss, as a 20mm MG 151/20 cannon fired through it. Where was a bright amber light going to be fitted amongst all this equipment? And even if one were fitted, what would be its purpose? There would appear to be no advantage in showing an enemy where one was. None of the other Halifax crews reported such an encounter.

July 1944 proved no better for No.178 Sqdn as the spate of mysterious rocket sightings continued. A return visit to the airfield at Feuersbrunn on the night of the 6/7th saw one crew reporting multiple air-to-air launches, three minutes after their bombs were released. At least nine rockets were seen by Sgt. M. F. Watson's crew from their "Lib", EV974, between 0105 and 0142 hours. *"As they passed through the air they left a trail of whitish smoke."* They even reported a Wellington bomber being hit by one of these at 7,500 feet, which then exploded in mid-air, although the crew did not see the aircraft fall out of the sky as they were too busy undergoing a series of evasive manoeuvres themselves at that point. The exploding Wellington was witnessed by another No.178 Sqdn crew but they did not report seeing any rockets. W/O A. L. Steele, flying Liberator EV829, was forced to take evasive action at 0116 hours when two "rockets" were fired at his bomber. He also reported *"10 more rockets seen, not fired at this aircraft."* Projectiles described as "rockets" were also noticed in the target area by P/O J.

Blanckenberg and his crew in KG828.[183] No.70 Sqdn Wellington LP465, flown by Australian pilot W/O D. C. Twigg, was reportedly hit by something, which caused damage to its rear turret and injuries to two crew members. Twigg believed it was either *"rockets or shells"*.[184] Six No.70 Sqdn Wellingtons were lost that night and two others from different units, with at least one being shot down by a twin-engined Bf 110 using *Schräge Musik*, the upward-firing machine-gun or cannon fixture fitted to several *Luftwaffe* night-fighter types.[185] However, it is difficult to reconcile this weapon, essentially a field modification widely adopted as an armament installation, with something that resembled an anti-aircraft rocket.

The night of 21/22nd July 1944 saw further "rocket" reports during a raid on the Fanto Werke oil refinery at Pardubice in Czechoslovakia. F/Lt. W. T. Wright and his crew in No.178 Sqdn Liberator Mk.VI KG873/Q were flying near Graz at about 0140 hours when they saw *"rockets from the ground and one from air".* F/Lt. T. E. Steele added to his personal tally of sightings as he saw *"rockets, air to air, seen on leaving target area."* The South African pilot Lt. N. E. Hayman, flying "Lib" EW233, had to take evasive action at around 2350 hours as he saw *"two rockets fired at* [his] *aircraft, red and white, 15 miles N of Vienna."* Several crews witnessed what were described as combinations of multi-coloured flares coming off the ground. These were red, green, and yellow.[186] Again, it has proved rather difficult to work out exactly what was being seen that night. The flares can probably be discounted although the "rockets" were something else entirely. If they were Wfr.Gr. 21s being fired by night-fighters, it seemed that the *Luftwaffe* were using hitherto unknown tactics. However, there were no "tell-tale" explosions caused by the detonation of the mortars after they reached their timed limit of travel. A strange phenomenon was being repeatedly witnessed by the crews, but it is not clear what it was.

If No.178 Sqdn had become a "magnet" for rocket reports, then Lt. Hayman was in the running for the pilot with the most sightings. On the evening of the 23rd, he flew Liberator EV961 on a mission to bomb the oil refinery at Prahova, near Bucharest. At 0106 hours, in

the target area, he reported seeing a *"light resembling a rocket mortar coloured red/green fired from ground at target."* P/O W. J. McDonald in EV839 had a much more unnerving experience, recording that rockets were actually fired at his aircraft at 0145 hours on the 24th:

"One Fw 190 seen. Flew under aircraft from port to starboard. Rear gunner then took over at starboard quarter. Enemy aircraft made a pass. Two rockets fired from below and passed 100 ft behind and up."

McDonald took violent evasive action, throwing his Liberator into a "corkscrew" manoeuvre to shake off his attacker. Fw 190s could carry two Wfr.Gr. 21 launchers, one under each wing, but this engagement took place over Romania, and the only night-fighters were twin-engined Bf 110s. However, his was not the only No.178 Sqdn crew to witness "rockets" that night. Lt. E. C. Thyer saw three being fired over the target area, but he believed they were not aimed at his aircraft.[187] "Fw 190s" had often been recorded by American crews raiding the oil refineries at Ploesti but some of these were Romanian IAR 80 and IAR 81 fighters, single-seat fighters which under certain circumstances looked somewhat similar. However, these reports were from daylight missions and the ARR never operated these fighters at night. One of No.614 Sqdn's Halifax bombers carrying out "Pathfinder" marking over the target had an encounter with what was thought to be a fighter. Whatever it was, it displayed a white light as it flew towards the RAF aircraft. A Liberator crew from No.178 Sqdn also reported this phenomenon, although orange lights were also seen.[188] Once again, mysterious lights, which may or may not have been attached to something, were being reported in the skies over Occupied Europe.

Theories abounded at the time as to why the enemy were showing lights, but none of them made much in the way of sense. Some believed that the coloured glows were reflections from the small radar scopes fitted in the *Luftwaffe* night-fighters. However,

such instruments were usually fitted with hoods to avoid this kind of giveaway lighting being shown, and even if this had been true, the illumination would not have been visible in the nose of any craft as the radar operator's position was always behind the pilot. In the case of a Bf 110 he sat on a swivel seat directly behind the main wing spar that ran through the middle of the elongated cockpit, just in front of the *Schräge Musik* installation. The muzzle flashes from these guns would have been visible but only very briefly, and bomber crews were used to seeing them. It is therefore unlikely that these would have been mis-reported. Another suggestion was that the white lights were guides for other fighters to find the bombers, although so-called "fighter flares" were the *Luftwaffe's* normal method of advertising the locations of the RAF's bomber stream. As previously mentioned, these were usually dropped well below the bombers or just above cloud cover, so that enemy *Terrorflieger* machines were silhouetted for night-fighter pilots operating at much higher altitudes. Yet another suggestion was the possibility that the enemy pilots were attempting to get RAF air gunners to open fire on them, so betraying their presence.[189] The options seem somewhat plausible if examined from a distance of almost eighty years, but in the context of wartime operations, they do not really stand up to scrutiny. Aircraft operating at night had flame dampeners fitted to their engine exhausts: why would these be used if the German crews simply disregarded any notions of creeping up unseen on their intended victims? None of it makes any sense.

More "rockets" were noted over the Ploesti oil refineries during a raid on the night of 26/27th July. Reports were made by No.178 Sqdn crews, including F/O G. D. McRae, the pilot of Liberator EW160, who noticed a single rocket in the target area around five minutes after midnight. It was also reported by Sgt. H. N. Howarth in EV906, who saw it passing over his aircraft at an estimated altitude of 9,000 feet. A third pilot from the same unit, F/Lt. W. J. McDonald, described it as a *"ball of fire seen moving in* [the] *sky – resembled rocket."* A different type of phenomenon was noted by F/Lt. D. A. Eardley in "Lib" EW233, who saw *"numerous balls of light appearing*

to rise slowly and burn out after 10-15 seconds." F/O J. B. Hurlburt, flying KG887, also saw these, describing them as *"several balls of light seen low, not clear whether on ground or in air."* He did however report having a "rocket" fired at his Liberator, but neither he nor the other members of his crew saw the enemy fighter that apparently fired it. Lt. Hayman in EV961 was another squadron pilot who reported seeing the rocket and claimed to see a single-engined aircraft in the same area, although it did not attack his bomber. Again, the simplest explanation suggests that the fighter was responsible for the rocket attacks, but the Wfr.Gr. 21 was not deployed at night.[190] In any case, if they were enemy air-to-air rockets, they were woefully inaccurate and a waste of resources.

A third type of phenomenon was noted during the same raid by another No.178 Sqdn pilot, Sgt. Andrew Wilson, who was flying Liberator Mk.VI EW106. He had already seen two "rockets" being fired 2,000 feet above his aircraft, which was at around 14,000 feet as he crossed the Danube. However, on leaving the target area, his "Lib" was *"followed by red light flashing on for 3 or 4 seconds then off."* It is not known how long the light pursued the bomber, but it was another strange item encountered during a raid full of weird occurrences.[191] Wilson's bomb-aimer was Sgt. Jim Auton. He wrote about his experience of having rockets launched at their Liberator in his book *RAF Liberator over the Eastern Front*, which was published in 2008. Auton does not indicate whether he was referring to this particular incident, but his account gives a startling insight into the possible attack:

"That night, after crossing the Alps, we experienced two attacks from aircraft firing rockets. The rockets glowed like the tips of cigarettes in the dark. When we saw them approaching, it was impossible to judge whether they would pass over the top or underneath us."

Jim Auton believed that they had been fired by German pilots who had launched them whilst still out of effective range, *"as the rockets dropped in an arc harmlessly below us."*[192]

As far as July 1944 was concerned, the month still was not over in terms of the squadron's intelligence officers collecting reports on the "rockets". Twenty-four hours after the Ploesti raid, No.178's Liberators were airborne again, this time bound for the Prahova oil refineries at Bucharest again. The continued bombing of oil plants was designed to cripple the Germans' ability to fight, especially now that their ground forces were engaged on three separate fronts. Sgt. Howarth, who had already witnessed a "rocket" in flight over Ploesti the night before, saw two more at 2202 hours. However, this time they had been *"fired from ground and burst about a mile away from aircraft."* The pilot reported he was at 11,000 feet at the time. Six minutes later, F/Lt. W. T. Wright noticed *"rockets fired into air to same height as aircraft"* – again, 11,000 feet. It is not recorded what the squadron's crews thought these were, but as the American night-fighter pilots would do later that same year, they probably believed they were some new type of enemy secret weapon. On the night of the 30th, No.178 Sqdn were sent out to mine the Danube again, and at 2222 hours one of the crews noticed a *"red light seen to starboard of track – about 6,000 ft, hanging for a long time."* Whilst not a "rocket", it was still a strange thing to see, and evidently worth the trouble in reporting.[193]

Squadron mission logs were not the only place that mention of strange rockets appeared in at that time. RAF Bomber Command's Operational Research Section was still busy collecting and collating reports of possible projectile weapons in July 1944. A brief paragraph from their monthly report for that month included the following details:

"There were the usual reports of ground-fired rocket projectiles, but some crews considered that the rate of fire indicated that these might be 50mm tracer, although they were fired up to 19/24,000 feet."[194]

Tracer bullets would never have reached such altitudes, and there was still the problem of which particular *Luftwaffe flak* rocket was

responsible for these reports, since no operational types existed at that stage of the war. The *Scheinsignalrakete* could not reach 19,000 feet.

Given the overwhelming number of “rocket reports”, I thought it would help to investigate just which *Luftwaffe* and ARR units flew the Fw 190 in the summer of 1944. This type would have been a natural candidate for *Wilde Sau* attacks at night, could carry the Wfr.Gr.21 and were based in the area. The ARR can be discounted, because it did not operate the type until September when it “inherited” 27 examples of the aircraft left behind when the Germans hurriedly evacuated Romania after the Russian invasion. This left only the various *Jagdgeschwaderen* of I. *Fliegerkorps* that were assigned to protect the Ploesti oilfields and other sections of the Romanian front. JG 52 was based in Romania for six weeks during the summer of 1944, but it flew Bf 109s, and many of its constituent units had moved west to support German defences in the aftermath of the Normandy invasion. IV./JG 54 *Grünhertz* (“Green Hearts”) was based in Austria but regularly flew with the surviving units of JG 52 against the Russians and also American daylight bombing raids. Their pilots flew Fw 190As and would not exchange them for the new “long nose” D-series machines until September 1944 at the earliest. However, as a day fighter unit with numerous *Experten* (“aces”) among its ranks, its personnel were not squandered in dangerous *Wilde Sau* flights in the dark, over territory with sparsely situated and unfamiliar airfields. That only left *Schlachtgruppe* 10 (SG 10, or “Ground Attack Group 10”), which flew the Fw 190A and F-series in direct support of the front-line forces. As they were ground-attack specialists, their aircraft were not optimised for air defence, and more importantly, their pilots were certainly not trained in that discipline. No night-fighter units operated the type at night in that part of the world. It is therefore rather puzzling to see which Fw 190s could have been in a position to operate sorties and carry Wfr.Gr. 21 rockets in order to attack the Liberators of No.178 Sqdn over the summer of 1944.[195] This begs the question of what were these “rockets” in the first place, if they were not German *flak* or air-to-air

rocket weapons? We have already looked at the *Scheinsignalrakete* and can rule it out as a possible explanation. I am at a loss to suggest what they were.

Nick Redfern and Andy Roberts co-authored *Strange Secrets: Real Government Files on the Unknown*, which was released in 2003. Among the wealth of cases mentioned was that of George Barton, who they listed as a Lancaster pilot *"who had a memorable encounter with one of the mystery objects in June 1944."* From the footnote in their book, the story originated in OVNI magazine in 1998. Barton was serving with No.576 Sqdn, based at RAF Elsham Wolds (the old airfield site now being cut in two by the present-day A15 dual carriageway south of the Humber Bridge):

"I remember the incident very well; the raid was just after 'D-Day', June 1944 and was the second of three raids we made on Stuttgart."

Barton stated that during his own debriefing, he overheard a conversation taking place at the next table, where the crew's rear gunner was talking rather excitedly about having witnessed spheres following their Lancaster bomber as they were approaching the target. According to Barton, the gunner thought these objects were a new German secret weapon:

"So he asked his skipper to take violent evasive action, while at the same time he tried to shoot them down. Neither action did any good, as the spheres easily kept their position behind the aircraft."

The pilot did not pay much attention to the report and only realised its significance years later, when stories of "Foo Fighters" began circulating.[196] It was easy to work out the date of the alleged sighting, although it was not "just after D-Day". No raids were undertaken against Stuttgart by the unit in June 1944. The three raids that Barton alluded to occurred over a four-night period in July 1944, seven weeks after the Normandy landings. The second of these took place on the night of 25/26th July, with seven aircraft from

No.576 Sqdn being detailed to attack the city as part of an effort involving 412 bombers. A further eight Lancasters were sent to attack suspected V-weapons sites in northern France. However, this is where the trail ends. In June 1944, George Barton was a Sergeant, and his name is listed in F/Lt. Charles Sawyer's crew. However, as Barton's name was listed second out of a seven-man crew, he was in fact a Flight Engineer and he appears as such in *"Order of Battle No.290"*, a comprehensive listing of squadron personnel.[197] Sawyer was an American who had travelled to Canada to enlist and receive pilot training as a member of the RCAF. In late 1943 he transferred to the United States Army Air Force but remained in No.576 Sqdn as one of their pilots. George Barton's name first appears in the June 1944 ORB on the 9th as Sawyer's flight engineer, and he went onto fly another eight missions with the American that month. [198]

However, I also discovered that Barton was then replaced in the Flight Engineer's position by a Sgt. Martin for the 2nd July raid on suspected V-weapons sites at Domleger in northern France. Barton's name is then absent from all of the subsequent missions carried out by No.576 Sqdn in July 1944, including all three Stuttgart raids towards the end of the month. Barton does not appear among the names of the crews of the fifteen aircraft that No.576 Sqdn sent out on the night of the 25/26th, the "second of the three raids" mentioned in *Strange Secrets*.[199] Given that George Barton was not a Lancaster pilot, and more importantly, he did not appear to be flying on "ops" with the unit for the entire month, it seems rather odd that he was able to attend a post-mission debriefing session as part of one of the unit's crews in July 1944. Unless evidence can be produced to verify his participation at the debrief, or that he was serving with another unit on the second Stuttgart mission in July, Sgt. Barton's "memorable encounter", which turned out at best to be a second-hand account of someone else's sighting, might be better taken with a large pinch of salt.

Back in Italy, August 1944 continued where July had left off in terms of "rocket" sightings made by the crews of No.178 Sqdn. In the

early hours of the 8th, some of its aircraft were dropping mines in the River Danube, but most were attacking the airfield at Szombathely in Hungary. It was an aircraft belonging to the latter group that encountered the first “rocket” that month. At 0202 hours, Sgt. W. E. Corbock, flying Liberator EW264, reported seeing *“a moving light in [the] air, resembling rocket, fired from ground, leaving trail of sparks, bursting about 6,500 feet then falling to ground.”*[200] However, given what is known about the German decoy signal rocket, this could have been a *Scheinsignalrakete*.

The Romană-Americană Refinery at Ploeşti-East was the target for the bombers of No.205 Group, RAF on the night of 9/10th August, and No.178 Sqdn’s Liberators were part of the strike force. About an hour and a quarter after dropping their bombs on the target, Sgt. John Rush, piloting EW231, was near the village of Bârca, about 40km east of Vidin on the River Danube, when his gunners drew his attention to two “red balls”, which were thought to have been rockets fired by an aircraft. They did not report seeing the enemy machine, however. According to the crew’s report, *“one ball seen falling and exploded hitting ground over Danube.”* Rush and his colleagues were not the only ones from the squadron to see “rockets”, as F/O G. D. McRae’s crew had a much more “buttock-clenching” experience over Romania the same night. Flying in EV961, at 0038 hours and whilst overflying the town of Vitkovac in Yugoslavia, not far from the Bulgarian border, they were *“attacked by single-engined night fighter – head on attack from starboard bow underneath, firing rockets. Exploded underneath aircraft.”* Somehow , these projectiles missed McRae’s “Lib” and his crew survived this particular engagement.[201] Once again, single-engined fighters flying at night and carrying what appeared to be Wfr.Gr. 21s did not fall within the known deployment of the weapon by the *Luftwaffe*, and yet if all of these rocket reports can be explained as rocket mortars, then there is a rather large gap in the knowledge of German wartime operations.

The strange silver-coloured, single-engined fighter, first reported over Feuersbrunn in Austria at the end of June 1944, made another

appearance, at least in the No.205 Group report describing the 9/10th raid on the refinery. It mentioned that three different bomber crews had seen it, and the report also included a note about *"persistent rocket attacks".*[202]

Strange Company gives details of a case which occurred on 12th August 1944, which involved the crew of Sqn Ldr Brian Frow's Lancaster on their return from an attack on oil refineries at "Pelice" in southern France. Onboard, the wireless (and radar) operator, Ronald Clairidge, experienced a malfunction in his H2S equipment, a navigation radar that could show ground features such as lakes, rivers and cities on a small scope known as a Plan Position Indicator. As he reported the problem to the pilot, he was interrupted by a yell of *"What the hell was that?"* Climbing into the Lancaster's astrodome, a small plexiglass "bubble" situated on top of the aircraft's fuselage, Clairidge saw what Frow was shouting about. A string of lights, seemingly stretching off to infinity on either side, sat off the bomber's starboard side, bright yellow in colour and changing to an intense white. The W/T operator estimated that the lights were 1,000 yards away. Clairidge realised that the lights were actually forming part of an enormous disc. It hovered in the sky, seemingly motionless, for around three minutes before shooting ahead of the Lancaster and disappearing. No-one in the crew saw any vapour trail, exhaust flames or heard engine noises as it departed. On their return to base, Sqn Ldr Frow and his crew gave the intelligence officer their own versions of the encounter, but no further questioning occurred. However, unlike previous incidents that have been listed in this book, Frow and his crew were then warned not to discuss their sighting with anyone else, and there was to be no written account of what had happened in their logbooks.[203]

Tracking the squadron down was easy enough. Finding the operations that Sqn Ldr Frow and his crew flew on in August 1944 threw up a small error which was a simple misspelling, but also involved some confusion regarding the account listed in *Strange Company*. The wireless operator was Ronald Claridge, not Clairidge,

and he served with No.7 Squadron based at RAF Oakington near Cambridge. Frow's crew for the raid on the 12th was as follows:

Sqn Ldr Brian G. Frow Pilot (and Master Bomber)
F/Lt. Richard E. Crompton-Batt Navigator
F/Lt. K. I. Milligan, RCAF Air Bomber
W/O Ronald R. Claridge Wireless Operator
W/O D. Morrison Flight Engineer
W/O Owen G. Erasmus Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
F/Lt. Ernest Wharton Air Gunner (rear turret)
F/Lt. Peter H. Cutchey Visual Marker (and front gunner)

No.7 Squadron was part of the RAF's Pathfinder Force, responsible for marking targets. F/Lt. Cutchey was a passenger with a special role, where he visually assessed the accuracy of the bomb impacts, and also assisted Sqn Ldr Frow in his duties as Master Bomber. This involved the rather hazardous job of circling over the target and giving a running commentary via radio whilst the raid was in progress, directing follow-up crews to the optimum release position in relation to the various flares visible in the zone. Also onboard was a dog which Brian Frow took on missions as a mascot.

Further details appear in Timothy Good's *Need to Know.* W/O Claridge had been looking out for enemy night-fighters using his "Fishpond" system, which used returns from the Lancaster's H2S ground scanning navigation radar equipment to "see" aircraft in close proximity. The screen, mounted in his radio operator's compartment behind the cockpit, had suddenly gone blank, prompting him to inform Frow about the issue with his set. From the astrodome, as Claridge's night vision improved, he could see the string of lights transform into a huge grey saucer-shaped object. It was difficult for him to estimate its size, although he said that compared with the mysterious saucer, their Lancaster was nothing more than *"a dot on a sheet of foolscap paper."* Its manner of departure was just as impressive, as it was just *"a flash of light and the vast size was gone in less than a second, without any noise or turbulence."*[204] When questioned about his sighting, long after the war had ended, Claridge

stated that at the time, his crew had no idea what they were watching. *“Don’t forget, we didn’t know what UFOs, or ‘flying saucers’ were.”*

When I looked into this case, there was some confusion as on 12/13th August, Sqn Ldr Frow was detailed to raid the Bordeaux Port Area, and he was the Deputy Master bomber on this mission. This would have been in support of aircraft from different units as No.7 Sqdn’s Lancasters were split over three separate targets that night. Other aircraft from his unit flew to the Forêt de Montrichard, where an oil dump and stores compound was located, and to Russelsheim in Germany. For the 10/11th, the ORB lists a mission to La Pallice, the port at La Rochelle in Brittany.[205] Given the similarity in the name, it would appear the date listed in previous works for the case was incorrect, although if the raid was against an oil target, then the 12th was more likely, even though Frow did not actually fly against one that night. The other possibility was that the ORB was incorrect, although his crew is not listed first among those that took part in the raid against Bordeaux and therefore one would assume that the clerk typing up the report would not have wrongly recorded the targets for three crews.

I am inclined to believe that Frow’s encounter occurred on the 10/11th for another good reason. Seeing only a string of lights and not realising it was part of a disc at first, suggests that the incident happened at night. No.7 Sqdn flew their sorties on the 12th during the day, taking off between 1100 and 1200 hours and returning six hours later, whilst the raid on La Pallice departed on the evening of the 10th and the bombers returned to Oakington in the early hours of the 11th.[206] Therefore, it is probably safe to say that Claridge and Frow’s sighting occurred on the earlier raid to France and the date in *Strange Company* and *Need to Know* is incorrect. On both occasions, Frow and his crew were flying in Lancaster Mk.III PA964/MG-K, which had been assigned to the squadron a month earlier.

If Sqn Ldr Frow’s crew had been warned not to include the incident in their logbooks, the same instruction had been given to the

intelligence officers as the ORB entries for the La Pallice raid do not give any details of lights that resemble a vast disc shaped object. Claridge believed that there were more intelligence staff present than normal at the post-raid debriefing session, although it is difficult to understand how they would have been aware of the sighting before Frow's crew had a chance to give their version of events. Possibly they were simply curious enough to gather round and listen to the crew's strange story. Apart from details relating to the raid itself, the return flight was summed up in the ORB using just a few words:

"Left at 23.09 hours. Raid went well. Large fire visibly 50 miles. Brought back: 4 T. I. Red L. B. 8 Flares hooded. (Not required.)"[207]

Nothing is mentioned about the incident in Tom Docherty's *No.7 Bomber Squadron in World War II*, published in 2007, either. Whilst the absence of information is not proof of a cover-up, it does raise an interesting question. What happened to the information given by the crew of the Lancaster?

It would appear that the crew did not suffer any setbacks to their flying careers after they reported the incident. Richard Crompton-Batt ended his second tour of operations five nights later and was posted away, later becoming a Sqn Ldr in his own right and serving with the Queen's Flight as a helicopter pilot in the 1960s. He also instructed HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, as part of the latter's helicopter flying training. Brian Frow also remained in the RAF after the war, serving in a number of flying and then staff posts. Ending up as an Air Commodore, he was appointed as Air Attaché to Moscow in 1972 and ended his RAF career as Air Commander of Hong Kong in 1977. After his retirement, he ran the Falklands Island Office in London until 1982. Frow died in September 2002. Peter Cutchey, the visual marker, was shot down as part of a different crew in September 1944 and became a prisoner of war. As far as I am aware, only Ronald Claridge has ever commented on the object that was encountered during the return from La Pallice.

In addition to the RAF, the South African Air Force contributed several squadrons to the Mediterranean campaign during WW2. One of these was No.34 (SAAF) Sqdn, which operated Liberator Mk.Vis on supply missions to the partisans in northern Italy, Yugoslavia and even Warsaw, along with their usual bombing and minelaying sorties over the Balkans. On the night of 16/17th August 1944, Lt. Cullingworth was flying EW236//Q on a mission to drop leaflets over an area between Cuers and Le Luc, north-east of the port of Toulon. During the mission, something rather strange was reported by Cullingworth's rear and mid-upper gunners:

"One aircraft with four large headlights shing along longitudinal axis of a/c. Followed aircraft "Q" for five minutes but although beam of lights swept the sky, they did not pick up aircraft. The aircraft with lights did not [press] home attack and eventually broke away."[208]

It is not clear what type of *Luftwaffe* aircraft would have had four incredibly powerful searchlights fitted, especially ones capable of "sweeping the sky". German night-fighters did not have such lights installed, even as locally-fitted modifications. Whatever this was, it did not appear to be an effective form of defence.

The Liberator crews belonging to No.178 Sqdn were definitely amassing a large number of sightings of strange objects and lights. On the night of 20/21st August 1944, they were sent to St. Valentin in Austria to attack the *Nibelungenwerk*, the largest tank assembly factory operated by the Nazis. This single facility produced over half of the Panzer IVs fielded by the *Heer* and SS, some 4,800 being built there. In addition, Jagdpanzer IV self-propelled tank destroyers, based on the Panzer IV chassis, were also constructed at the huge plant. According to the squadron's ORB, Lt. Teddy Potgieter was the skipper of "Lib" EW233, and just after midnight, his aircraft was followed briefly by a red light, believed to be fitted to an unidentified enemy night-fighter. The light approached his Liberator twice, but no attack ensued. The South African pilot threw his aircraft into a series of violent manoeuvres to evade the suspected enemy machine as a

precaution. Members of his crew believed they saw it falling away and on fire a minute or so later. It may have also been spotted ten minutes earlier by the crew of KG942, piloted by Sgt. John Rush, who saw what was reported as an *"aircraft believed to be Liberator followed by unidentified aircraft with light in nose."*[209] It is possible that this may well have been a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter, although as with earlier reports, flying around with a light advertising one's presence seemed somewhat counter-productive for an enemy pilot.

Lt. Potgieter saw more lights during a raid on the marshalling yards at Miskolc in Hungary on the night of 21/22nd August, but on this occasion, the No.178 Sqdn aircraft appeared to be surrounded by them. About two hours into the outward flight, whilst in the area of Đakovo, Croatia, *"a red light* [was] *seen on port quarter above"* his aircraft, Liberator EW233. At the same time, an enemy night-fighter seemed to pass directly below his bomber and so Potgieter immediately commenced a series of turns and dives. This was succesfully evaded but the South African had less luck shaking the mysterious lights. A few minutes later, the light was back:

"Red light again seen on port quarter below and another to starboard and yet another astern. Evasive action taken. Red light on port followed aircraft in same position. Rockets were fired from slightly astern beam and below – passed in front of aircraft at angle to line of flight."[210]

It is difficult to understand just what was happening that night in the skies over Croatia. If it were a night-fighter attack, then three separate aircraft surrounding a bomber appeared to be overkill, and they would not have necessarily needed "rockets" to bring it down. Cannon or machine-gun fire would have been sufficient at such close range. In addition, the *Luftwaffe* night-fighter force did not hunt in "packs" as there were usually very few aircraft available, compared to the large number of bombers that flew through their areas of operations. There was also the risk of night-fighters crashing into each other, getting in each other's way when closing

for an attack, or even the possibility of “friendly fire” as it was not unheard of for some of their colleagues to be mistaken for Mosquitoes. It was also strange that the descriptions of the lights did not include mention of the aircraft that they were fitted to. None of the other Liberator crews from the squadron saw these lights that night. Mysterious lights and rockets – the unit was certainly racking up more than its fair share of sightings.

The same night, No.34 (SAAF) Sqdn were also operating over Hungary although their target was the Szony oil refinery, located about 45 miles north-west of Budapest. Captain Carter took off in Liberator EW205/Q from Celone in Italy at 1958 hours and reached the refinery around 2252. As they headed away from the target, Carter’s crew noticed a red light, one which suddenly turned white. They were unable to see if it was attached to anything, although it did follow them for several minutes before vanishing. It was believed at the time to be a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter.[211]

On the night of 22/23rd August, the squadron sent its bombers out to raid the railway marshalling yards at Miskolc in north-eastern Hungary. The crew of EW230/H, flown by Major Smuts, reported that they were followed by a red light for eight minutes after leaving the target area. No German night-fighters were seen, and no attacks were made on the bomber. On the same evening, another red light was witnessed by Lt. Goldschmidt’s crew as they flew over Monte Adamello, a peak north-west of Lake Garda. A third crew in KG235/B, flown by Lt. Cullingworth, confirmed that they saw a similar light. It was reported as easily following them through a long series of evasive manoeuvres, which lasted for around 20 minutes. The light was officially recorded as a possible night-fighter. [212]

Lt. Gunn was another of the South African squadron’s Liberator pilots. On the evening of 28th August 1944, near Đakovo in Croatia, his gunners reported seeing a red light, approaching them from astern at around 2230 hours. It was believed to be a night-fighter. The light was estimated to be 800 yards away when Gunn threw his aircraft, EW232/D, into a corkscrew manoeuvre to evade the suspected *Luftwaffe* machine. Half an hour later, another one was

spotted much further away but it did not pursue them.[213] It may have been no coincidence that Lt. Potgieter from No.178 Sqdn had been “surrounded” by red lights in the area of Đakovo just a week earlier.

The month wasn’t over for the South African unit as far as encountering strange red lights was concerned. On the final evening of the month, 31st August, No.34 (SAAF) Sqdn’s target was the rail marshalling yards located at Ferrara in northern Italy. Lt. Hoffe and his crew took off from Celone in Liberator EW235/M at 1907 hours. As they left the target area at around 2140 hours, Hoffe’s gunners spotted a red light *“which followed them for some time”* before finally disappearing.[214] These lights had been witnessed over northern Italy and the Balkans by both RAF and SAAF units in August 1944, and they would see more before the year was out.

No.178 Sqdn continued to operate their Liberator bombers against a wide range of targets in northern Italy and the Balkans. On the evening of 1st September, it dispatched seven of its aircraft against the railway marshalling yards at Bologna. The crew of KW280, piloted by Sgt. F. H. Williams, noticed a large blue light in the vicinity of the target area but they did not know what it was. Another aircraft, flown by Lt. G. Rosenthal, witnessed what were described as *“rockets being fired from the ground”*, which cascaded white stars.[215] The latter were possibly some new kind of fighter flare, although these were normally dropped from *Luftwaffe* night-fighters. The pilot was also flying at over 10,000 feet, which would seem to rule out the ground-launched, solid-fuelled *Scheinsignalraketen*. They did not carry enough propellant to reach that altitude. The other five Liberator crews did not report anything unusual, at least in terms of what was listed within the ORB. No.614 Sqdn participated in the same raid: the crew of Halifax Mk.II JP241, which was flown by P/O Bruce Prange, RCAF, also witnessed “rockets” in the sky over the target area.[216]

No.34 (SAAF) Sqdn also raided Bologna that evening, and one of its Liberator crews found itself with a “shadower” after bombing the rail yards:

"At 2215 a light went on when about 30 miles off coast [of Adriatic] parallel with a/c. Turned into and away when about 800 yards [distant]."[217]

The report was made by Capt, Joseph Capstick, the pilot of EW205/Q. Just nine days later, he and his crew failed to return from a minelaying sortie along the Danube after hitting a power cable whilst flying at extreme low level.. On the night of the 8th, EW235/M, flown by Lt. Hoffe, had bombed the rail yards at Ferrara when he and his crew were followed by a red light to the Adriatic coast. Evasive action was eventually taken, and the strange light disappeared. Hoffe also reported seeing a red light behind him during the outbound flight to the target as he overflew Ancona.[218] Ferrara was in the Po Valley, where American night-fighter squadrons also based in Italy were beginning to see "balls of fire", which they would soon come to known as "Foo Fighters".

If aircrew testimony is to be believed, one of the first mentions of an encounter with a *Luftwaffe* jet night-fighter occurred in the early hours of 13th September 1944, north-east of Brussels. According to Warrant Officer William Newhouse, a navigator/radar operator with No.264 Sqdn, which was temporarily based at Advanced Landing Ground B17 at Caen-Carpiquet airfield in France, he and his Australian pilot F/O John Duffy were vectored onto a contact by GCI radar. This occurred just after midnight. Newhouse's memories were included as one of the chapters in *The Fear in the Sky: Vivid Memories of Bomber Aircrew in World War II*.[219] Although their Mosquito NF.XIII, serial number MM549, was fast, it was not quite fast enough to catch the fleeting contact over eastern Belgium.

Giving up the chase and landing back at Airfield B17 at around 0245 hours, the crew were debriefed, only to be told by their intelligence officer that what they had been chasing was one of the new Messerschmitt Me 262s. With the benefit of hindsight, this is at odds with reality at the time. The Germans had only decided to build a night-fighter version of the Me 262 on 1st September 1944 and it

was at least two months before one of the converted day fighter versions took off on a night-time training flight. The first of the specially-built two-seater Me 262 trainer variants were not ready until the end of March 1945. Up until mid-November 1944 at the very earliest, no Me 262 jets were flying at all at night. What were Duffy and Newhouse chasing after that could move so fast? Although the intelligence staff believed they had encountered a Me 262, without knowing what had actually occurred that night, the unsuspecting researcher looking at the No.264 Sqdn ORB would only see a single word that was used to sum up the sortie: *"Uneventful."*[220] Clearly something capable of extremely high speeds was flying over eastern Belgium during the hours of darkness in mid-September 1944. The crew knew what V-1 flying bombs looked like at night, but this was not one of them.

Newhouse's encounter may have been the first such claim regarding a German jet at night, but more were to follow. No.462 Sqdn was one of the Australian-crewed units in RAF Bomber Command. After being stationed in Libya during 1943, it was renumbered in March 1944 on arrival in Italy. Reformed at Driffield in North Yorkshire in August of that year and re-quipped with Halifax Mk.IIIs, it initially operated it in the conventional night-bombing role. On the night of 15th September 1944, fifteen aircraft were sent out to attack the dockyards and submarine facilities at Kiel. According to the squadron's ORB, a *"possible jet-propelled"* aircraft was witnessed over the target area.[221] Given the style in which the unit's records officer laid out the raid report, it is not possible to work out which crew was involved in the sighting or obtain any more details. However, no *Luftwaffe* jet aircraft were operating at night at this particular stage of the war, so it is unclear what was actually encountered.

Crews were not always accustomed to seeing V-2 rocket launches, but once they had witnessed one, they knew what they were, and even if they didn't, the intelligence staff back at base would have set them right when they gave a description of a launch. Sqn Ldr Jeremy Howard-Williams was a night-fighter pilot with the

RAF's Fighter Interceptor Development Squadron based at Ford in West Sussex. On the night of 16th September 1944, he flew Mosquito NF Mk.30 HK360 on a so-called "Flower" intruder mission over Gütersloh and Paderborn. Whilst flying over Holland, he and his navigator spotted a bright light far below them:

"As we cross in just north of the Hague, we see a white flame pulsing at ground level and, because nobody has told us that V-2s don't take off with a rush like a child's firework rocket, we don't realise what we are looking at. They have only been coming over for about a week and are still rather strange and secret."[222]

However, elsewhere in Europe, the V-2 could not be blamed for incidents that otherwise defied explanation. Reports of strange lights over the Balkans continued to be reported by the heavy bomber units belonging to No.205 Group, Bomber Command, who attacked numerous targets in the region from their bases in Italy. On the night of 26th September 1944, No.178 Sqdn sent its B-24 Liberators out to attack the railway viaduct at Borovnica, located in the Inner Carnolia region of Slovenia. The viaduct carried the Ljubljana to Trieste railway line and had been repaired by the Germans after partial demolition by the retreating Yugoslavian army in April 1941. The crew of B-24 KH155, flown by Lt T. D. Feigister, witnessed several balls of yellow light over the target area. They were described as being *"much brighter than normal flares burning at 8-9,000 feet mark."* Rockets were also ruled out by the crew as no smoke trails were noted.[223]

Meanwhile, the RAF's Light Night Striking Force, comprising a group of de Havilland Mosquito bomber squadrons used for diversionary raids, were beginning to have their own strange encounters with mysterious "rockets" and "jets". On the night of 3/4th October, KB199/M5-A, flown by F/O J. S. Etherington, was one of five Mossies from No.128 Sqdn sent against the city of Kassel. A line in the squadron ORB simply states the following:

“Jet A/C seen 7°E on way home.”

The crew had left the target at around 2230 hours and landed back at base just after midnight, so it was pitch dark when the sighting occurred.[224] No *Luftwaffe* jets were yet operating at night at this time, so what had the pilot and his navigator witnessed? Two Mosquito crews from one of the other Light Night Striking Force units, No.692 Sqdn, also reported seeing a jet fighter at 2255 hours over the Essen area that evening.[225] This was far too early in the conflict for Me 262s to be operating at night, so what had the Mosquito crews actually witnessed? The bombers were also operating at altitudes of around 24-25,000 feet so the “jet” would not have been a V-1 flying bomb, as they cruised more than 20,000 feet below that. The launch of a V-2 would have been unmistakable.

On the evening of 13th October 1944, No.178 Sqdn sent ten Liberators to bomb the marshalling yards at Székesfehérvár in Hungary. After seven “fighter flares” had been seen, the crew of B-24 KH103, piloted by F/O B. P. Taylor, noticed what was described in the ORB as *“an intermittent red light seen astern for some minutes after.”* A line of red balls of light were seen on or close to the ground by another crew from the same unit that evening. Four nights later, the squadron sent another ten bombers to bomb more marshalling yards, this time at Vinkovci in Croatia. At 2057 hours, the crew of KG998, flown by F/O N. E. Sanders, reported the following:

“Unidentified aircraft with white light in nose, crossed from port bow to starboard bow on a heading of approximately 270°. Height of 12-13,000 feet.”

F/Lt. John Musgrave, who was flying KW276, another Liberator from the same unit, sighted what he believed were two enemy aircraft with flashing white lights during the same evening. The final strange report of the night came courtesy of F/Sgt. W. W. Waterton, piloting Liberator KG940. His post-mission debriefing included the following interesting incident, entered in the squadron’s ORB:

“Aircraft followed by two red lights for about 12 minutes on way into target.”[226]

Unfortunately, there are no further details of this encounter. No *Luftwaffe* night-fighter units were assigned to Croatia or Serbia, as by that stage of the war, every spare aircraft was needed for the defence of Germany. It is unlikely that any day-fighter pilots took the risk of operating at night over those countries, even against Allied air raids. In any case, carrying sets of flashing or constantly illuminated nose-mounted lights would have only drawn unwanted attention to them. Reports such as these are therefore intriguing and took place before the American “Foo Fighter” encounters.

RAF Liberator crews were not the only ones to witness red lights that night. No.34 (SAAF) Sqdn also sent aircraft to bomb the marshalling yards at Székesfehérvár. Among them was Liberator KG936/B, flown by Capt. Maxwell. At 2017 hours, about ten minutes after bombing the target, no less than six red lights were witnessed following his aircraft. No attack was seen to take place, but his gunners noticed that one of the lights appeared to be gaining on them. Evasive action was taken but seemingly to no avail, but after a while the lights simply disappeared.[227]

Crews from No.57 Sqdn reported seeing “jet propelled aircraft” south of Stuttgart late on the evening of 19th October, on their return journey from bombing Nürnberg.[228] The unit’s intelligence staff appeared to minimise the amount of information they recorded in the Summary and Record of Events ORBs for the unit, so no further details were provided. However, there were no *Luftwaffe* jets that would have been operational or even test flown in the dark at that time. Fast moving lights were in the skies over Germany once more, and in the absence of firm information, Bomber Command’s intelligence staff sided with the aircrew reports in terms of labelling these as enemy jets. Such weapons had been expected to be fielded against the night bombers and therefore it was natural to believe the lights were jets.

On the evening of 20th October 1944, No.178 Sqdn's Liberators were sent out to bomb the airfield at Szombathely in Hungary. The crew of B-24 EV906, flown by F/O J. T. Clegg, were *"trailed by a white light, very close astern"*, from around 2211 hours, about 15 minutes after dropped their bombs on the target. Evasive action was taken by the pilot and the light disappeared. Thirty minutes later, a red light was seen dead astern of their aircraft, followed almost immediately by another one which appeared at very close range. Again, Clegg took evasive action and the light then vanished.[229] No explanation was provided for any of the three lights. His crew were not the only one from No.178 Sqdn to be followed by lights on the Szombathely raid. Sgt. R. M. Padovani, the rear gunner in Liberator KG940, piloted by W/O V. J. Langley, spotted a red light off his aircraft's starboard quarter at about the same height. It was estimated at about 500 yards away and Padovani opened fire, letting loose around 40-50 rounds. There was no discernible effect and the light disappeared. Firing upon strange lights with no apparent effect was reminiscent of the March 1942 encounter involving the Polish Wellington crew. A third No.178 Sqdn crew, this time flying in B-24 KH241, saw what they believed to be an *"aircraft with a white light"* circling Zagreb.[230] Predictably, the exact type of aircraft involved was not identified but the light was certainly seen.

More mysterious "jets" featured in official squadron reports on the night of 24th October, but how they were recorded by one particular unit was even stranger. No.692 Sqdn sent out twelve Mosquitoes to bomb Hanover, the aircraft dropping their bombs on target even though the individual timings went slightly astray. What was more interesting, however, was the following comment made in the raid summary:

"There was moderate flak over the area and several jet fighters were seen near Osnabrück, some in formation, but they made no contact."[231]

In reality, *Luftwaffe* jet fighters were yet to make an appearance at night at that date, so recording formations of them was definitely something out of the ordinary. V-1 flying bombs and V-2 rockets would not have been fired in this fashion, so this particular report is intriguing as it is simply so odd. Strange formations of fast-moving lights may have been the only thing the crews really saw that night.

The night of 27/28th October 1944 saw a bumper crop of sightings that were officially reported by crews from No.128 Sqdn. At least six separate mentions of "rockets" or "jets" appears in the squadron ORB for the raid on Berlin that night, which featured eight Mosquitoes from the unit.[232] These are listed here with the pilots and navigators names, plus the individual aircraft that were involved:

KB199/M5-A F/O N. M. McNulty F/O J. R. Maconachie
"Rocket or Jet Job seen at 2341 near Dutch coast."
KB387/M5-F F/O J. W. Smith Sgt. C. C. Hill
"Saw possible rocket at 33°E."
KB443/M5-D F/Lt D. Galanter's Sgt. M. C. Dempsey
"Jet Jobs or V2 seen at 2340 near Dutch coast."
KB403/M5-S F/Lt J. S. Etherington F/O H. P. Crumplin
"Saw 2 rockets as per Wollstead at 2322 and 2356."
KB363/M5-U F/Lt. P. J. Duncan Sgt. W. G. Parker
"Jet seen near Dutch coast at 2340 hours."
KB449/M5-V F/O A. W. Robinson Sgt. D. Harper
"Jet seen at 2345 off Dutch islands and yellow boozer."

Mention of "yellow boozer" is interesting here. Boozer was a rudimentary early warning receiver, tuned to the frequencies used by *Luftwaffe* airborne radar sets. A yellow lamp in the cockpit lit up when the system detected a nearby pulse, signifying an active interception radar. However, in practice Boozer rarely worked properly, so it is interesting to read that the cockpit lamp illuminated when the supposed *Luftwaffe* jet was encountered off the Dutch coast. It is possible that some of the sightings listed that night were V-2 rockets being launched against London, as no night-fighters

were active on that particular evening, never mind jet-propelled ones.[233] Rockets were certainly launched from sites in south-western Holland at that time, as the first V-2 exploded in Chiswick, London, on 8th September 1944.

On the evening of the 28th, several Mosquito crews from No.692 Sqdn reported seeing jets as they departed the target area over Köln.[234] The unit mission summaries also include further sightings the following night during a raid on the same city. However, there are no further details although with knowledge of the *Luftwaffe's* attempts to field jet fighters at night, seeing such aircraft was simply impossible in late October 1944. It is more likely that fast moving lights were witnessed, and they were recorded as "jets". Another crew from the same squadron reported seeing another one on the night of the 30th, but this case stood out from the rest:

"A jet aircraft was seen at 40,000 ft between Hamburg and Hannover."[235]

This was an incredibly high altitude for jets to be operating at, given that the Me 262's service ceiling was around 37,500 feet (11450m) and the Ar 234 *Blitz* was just 33,000 feet (10000m). No other *Luftwaffe* jet types would have been flying in the area mentioned at that time. The swept-forward wing Junkers Ju 287 project had already been cancelled and the Heinkel He 162 *Volksjäger*, still undergoing flight trials, never flew at night.

Jet-propelled aircraft were now being reported at night over Germany by RAF crews on a regular basis before these aircraft had even become operational. In addition, these sightings were not V-2 launches, as the operational batteries were located much further west in Holland and fired their missiles westwards towards the cities of Antwerp, Paris and London. One example occurred at around 2120 hours on the evening of 30th October 1944. No.300 Sqdn had sent its Lancaster bombers out to attack Köln. On leaving the target area, the crew of Mk.III LM632/BH-O, flown by F/O Z. Kolodziej, noticed an *"unidentified Jet Propelled aircraft".* It was not observed

by any of the other bomber crews from that particular unit.[236] The incident occurred several weeks before the first of the two Messerschmitt Me 262A-1a day-fighters being converted to temporary night-fighters were ready for nocturnal test flights, let alone potential combat missions. Several two-seater Me 262s were converted to the night-fighter role by Deutsche Lufthansa at their Berlin-Staaken workshops but this work had only just begun in mid-October 1944, and the first aircraft was not available until March 1945. One therefore wonders what the Polish crew was witnessing.

Strange Company also gave brief details of another sighting which occurred in October 1944, involving the crew of a No.640 Sqdn Halifax Mk.III returning from a raid on Köln. The bomber was flying at around 19,000 feet, above a layer of complete overcast, although visibility was excellent with clear conditions. Keith Chester quoted from correspondence between the aircraft's flight engineer, Maurice Juberley, and researcher Andy Roberts back in 1987. According to the former airman, the rear gunner reported that a *"ball of fire"* was following them from behind. Juberley used the astrodome to look in that direction and stated that he saw *"a circular, pale orange, clean edged light, dead astern."* It was closing on their Halifax. Without any other visual clues, Juberley believed it was a night-fighter, even though its wings were not showing. As per procedure, the rear gunner shouted for the pilot to "corkscrew to port" and the Halifax entered the standard evasion manoeuvres, losing the light in the process. However, a nearby RAF bomber was seen to catch fire. Juberley and his crew naturally believed that the mysterious light was an enemy fighter.[237]

"Juberley" was in fact Sgt. Miles Duberley, and he was indeed a Flight Engineer, part of F/O M. J. Tily's crew in Halifax Mk.III NP953/C8-G. They were based at RAF Leconfield in East Yorkshire. According to the No.640 Sqdn ORB for October 1944, the raid on the night of 30th/31st October 1944 took place in conditions described as being "as light as day" above the cloud cover over Köln. There is nothing listed in Tily's debrief summary beyond what took place over the target, so if the sighting was reported when the crew returned,

the details were kept out of the ORB.[238] Only two *Luftwaffe* night-fighters were spotted whilst the unit's bombers were in the target zone. Sgt. Lowson was the rear gunner who initially saw the object approaching their aircraft, but it is not recorded if he opened fire on it during the evasive corkscrew manoeuvre that Tily instigated. The bomber that Duberley's crew saw catch fire just after their encounter with the orange "ball of fire" presumably belonged to another unit, as his own squadron did not lose any aircraft that night, although it has been impossible to work out which one it was. One explanation would be that the bright light was an airborne searchlight carried by a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter, but the Germans did not develop this kind of technology, preferring to rely instead upon searchlights located on the ground, controlled by *Würzburg* search radar systems. Duberley told researcher Andy Roberts that other crews in his squadron had reported similar sightings at their own debriefing sessions. No mention of this incident is listed in the published history of No.640 Sqdn by Bill Norman.[239] It is a pity that none of the crews from the other aircraft that had their own encounters decided to come forward to give their stories after the war.

The final raid entries for No.158 Sqdn ORB covering October 1944 give intriguing snippets of information, using language that suggests a level of uncertainty as to what had been seen over the target areas on these two occasions. The unit raided Köln on the evening of the 30th/31st, no less than 23 aircraft from the squadron joining a further 794 from other bases. Hidden away in the ORB raid summary were the following details:

"One believed jet-propelled fighter was seen in the target area, but no combats were reported. A rocket type of projectile was seen by aircraft N to come up from the ground and then travel horizontally across the track of aircraft stream for a short time before tailing off."

F/O A. W. Meaden and his crew in Halifax Mk.III HX356/NP-G encountered the following over the target area:

“A jet propelled aircraft, which looked like a flying-bomb, was seen at 21.16 hours over the target area, flying at about 15,000 feet with whitish flame from behind which lit up the aircraft.”[240]

Although this sounds like nothing more than a V-1 flying bomb, it should be noted that the cruising altitude of one of these weapons was around 3,500 feet. They did not fly much higher than that. A similar device was reported by two Mosquito crews sent by No.692 Sqdn to attack Köln on the evening of the 30th. F/Lt. R. J. Momo in Mk.XVI PF392 and F/Lt. A. W. Lockhart, DFM, in PF397 both witnessed the following during the raid, which was in support of the Main Force:

“A jet aircraft was seen by both crews, and also a rocket bomb which appeared to come from the Rotterdam area.”[241]

This “rocket bomb” sounded suspiciously like the object reported by F/O Meaden, the Halifax pilot, although the two events were separated by a distance of around 160 miles. However, more sightings were still to come. Bomber Command’s Main Force revisited the city of Köln on the night of 31st October/1st November, 436 aircraft being sent out in total, including nine from No.158 Sqdn. Again, the summary in the ORB is illuminating, especially the wording that was used:

“Several objects, believed to have been jet propelled fighters, were seen around the target area.”

The individual reports from squadron crews showed that something rather strange was flying around the Aachen area. Sqn Ldr T. L. Parry, one of the flight commanders, flying NR177/NP-W, reported seeing two “jet fighters” in the vicinity of the city on the evening of the 31st. The first was spotted near Liege in eastern Belgium, around half-an-hour before he and his crew reached the target:

“Believed jet fighter seen at 5016N.0530E. 2044 hrs 18,000 ft, approximately 10 miles on starboard bow climbing rapidly from lower altitude and leaving slight smoke trail. A second jet fighter was seen at 5020N.0615E. 2056 hrs, 18,000 ft, climbing rapidly some 10 miles ahead.”

About a minute later, F/Lt. A. R. Christian and other members of his crew in Halifax MZ396/NP-C witnessed one of the objects that Parry had seen:

“Steady yellow flame similar to flying bomb jet was seen at 5018N.0613E. 2057 hrs, 18,000 ft heading steady and travelling across track from stbd to port. Believed jet fighter.”

F/Lt. R. E. New in NR174/NP-L reported seeing no less than “three jet-propelled fighters” between 2046 and 2056 hours, again at an altitude of 18,000 feet. This was way above the cruising level of a V-1 flying bomb but an object climbing rapidly could well have been a V-2 rocket, if not for the fact that they were being reported as jet fighters travelling across the track of the bombers, not upwards and out of sight as a missile would. However, it is likely that F/O I. Kuperman from the same squadron did witness a V-2 launch that evening, as he reported seeing a *“rocket projectile with a whitish trail”* travelling upwards at an 80° angle.[242]

However, the increased number of mystery jet sightings made at the end of October 1944 would soon pale into insignificance when Bomber Command raided three targets, Oberhausen, Düsseldorf and Bochum, during the first four days of November. Even though the Luftwaffe was still not yet in a position to field any usable jet night-fighters – with the Me 262 being the only candidate – such aircraft were about to be reported in droves.

The RAF’s Light Night Striking Force was raiding Berlin almost every evening, using a small group of anything up to fifty fast Mosquito bombers drawn from across a number of units. Although causing nowhere near the amount of destruction and disruption

caused by Bomber Command's Main Force, these nuisance raids allowed the capital's defences no rest at all. The *Luftwaffe* retained a large night-fighter presence over Berlin, one that was largely ineffective as its aircraft struggled to catch the Mossies due to their speed. A sizeable number of flak guns were also required, despite overwhelming pressure to release some for front-line duties. In terms of numbers of Mosquitos over the *Reich's* capital, 1st November 1944 was no exception, No.692 Sqdn at RAF Graveley in Cambridgeshire sending nine Mosquito Mk.XVIs to Berlin. Reports of two jet aircraft were made, although it is not recorded which crews did so. It was not the only official report of a jet-propelled machine made that night, as the unit's ORB also mentions that another one was spotted the following evening during a raid on Osnabrück after the Mosquitoes were returning to base. Again the exact details were not given.[243]

Another Mosquito unit, No.608 Sqdn, was one of the original Auxiliary Air Force squadrons formed in the early 1930s. It had operated Mosquitoes since August 1944, flying night bombing missions against Berlin and other priority targets for the rest of the war. On the evening of 1st November, W/O Turner and Sgt. Smith bombed what was called *"an unidentified target 53.50N 10.40E"*, located east of Hamburg in a rural area near the town of Schwarzenbek. They were flying in Mk.XX KB426/6T-K.The following was recorded in the squadron's ORB:

"When in estimated Lubeck area [at around 1915 hours], a Jet Aircraft was sighted astern. Flak came up in front, so we bombed this area and made a steep turn to starboard. Enemy aircraft was lost to sight." [244]

The type of jet was not mentioned. 1st November 1944 was far too early for any of the Me 262s that would eventually operate from bases located in that area of northern Germany, and in any case no examples of the type had been made ready for night operations at that stage of the war. No other jet aircraft were flying in the dark, so it

is difficult to work out what the No.608 Sqdn crew or unidentified crews from No.692 Sqdn had witnessed.

Crews from the "heavies" also reported seeing jets that same evening. The crew of No.429 ("Bison") Sqdn Halifax Mk.III MZ474/AL-B, flown by P/O C. B. Gray, were about an hour from the target at Oberhausen when *"a jet propelled aircraft was seen ahead and climbing at 1933 hrs, 51.22N 04.26E."*[245] This was just west of the centre of Antwerp. V-1 flying bombs and V-2 rockets were launched at the city at this time, but they would have been descending towards, not climbing away from this location. However, this and the Mosquito crews' sightings were just the beginning of a much larger set of encounters. What occurred during the Düsseldorf and Bochum raids on the 2nd and 4th was unparalleled in terms of reporting of *Luftwaffe* jet and rocket-powered types in such a short space of time.

According to No.462 Sqdn's ORB, at least one of the Australian unit's bombers engaged an aircraft that should not have been in the skies over the city at all during the Düsseldorf raid on the evening of 2nd November:

"There are reports of several jet A/C in T/A [target area]. 'M' fired at a believed ME 163 at 0520 E homeward with results not observed."[246]

Unfortunately the records did not identify which of the squadron's Halifax bombers aircraft "M" was. Looking deeper, I believe this was LW440/Z5-M, flown by P/O D. M. Taylor. However, no combat reports exist in relation to his gunners, Sgts. Rees and Somerville. As for the gunners' target being a Me 163 *Komet* interceptor, with hindsight this was an absurd proposition. However, it was not the last time this diminutive aircraft would be claimed as either fired upon or shot down during November. Clearly fast-moving lights or objects were being seen over Germany, but what were they?

More evidence of suspected jet encounters can be found in *Nachtjagd War Diaries Volume 2*, an essential reference for anyone

wanting to learn about the German night-fighter force in WW2. Its authors confirmed that at least twelve Halifax crews from No.4 Group reported encounters with suspected jets on the night of 2/3rd November 1944, eight of which had been claimed as shot down. Five of the engagements had occurred in the Düsseldorf-Düren area and resulted in the aircraft being claimed as destroyed. Ten more attacks reportedly took place as the RAF bombers flew west from Aachen, these engagements playing out over liberated territory. Even if the Luftwaffe had been carrying out live combat trials involving prototype Me 262 night-fighters, they would not have used them over enemy territory in case the aircraft encountered difficulties. The authors of *Nachtjagd* were very clear on whether these particular aircraft were to blame for these encounters:

"There is not a single piece of evidence, however, to suggest that jet-propelled fighters were active against the Main Force."[247]

The authors suggested that the bombers encountered V-1 flying bombs although it is difficult to understand how aircrew flying at medium to high altitudes could have engaged these weapons, which cruised at much lower levels. No.4 Group reports were easy to find during a trawl of the individual squadron records. No.466 Sqn, Royal Australian Air Force, based at RAF Driffield in the East Riding of Yorkshire, sent out fifteen Halifax Mk.IIIs to bomb Düsseldorf on the late afternoon of 2nd November. The raid summary in the ORB was explicit:

"There are reports of several jet A/C in T/A [target area] and MZ294 had a combat with two with possible strikes on one of them. NR127 had a combat with a jet A/C and received slight damage."

W/O A. F. Willington was piloting MZ294 and described *"two combats with jet propelled aircraft"*, whilst F/O J. H. ("Joe") Herman in NR127 reported damage apparently inflicted by a jet fighter.[248] Both encounters took place in the target area and occurred around

1930 hours, in darkness but during a period of bright moonlight, with no cloud cover.[249] The combat reports for the unit are missing from the National Archives so it is impossible to know whether the damage to the aircraft was sustained from a possible fighter attack or from *flak* which hit the bomber at the same time.

More engagements with strange jet fighters ensued. Intelligence staff belonging to No.76 Sqdn diligently recorded the mission details for P/O E. H. Le Cren's crew for the Düsseldorf raid, which included the following line:

"Aircraft 'L' (P/O Le Cren) claimed one 'kill' in shooting down jet propelled fighter."[250]

No.158 Sqdn went one better, with two of its Halifax crews claiming "jets" shot down. According to the ORB raid summary, *"Aircraft E claimed two jet fighters destroyed and M claimed one jet fighter destroyed."* The individual mission reports included much more detail. Aircraft "E" was MZ468/NP-E, flown by F/O J. H. Robinson. His rear gunner was Sgt. D. H. Pemble, who claimed the two "jet fighters" destroyed:

"Shot down one of 2 jet fighters 15 miles SW of Dusseldorf at 1935 hrs, 15,000 ft. Claimed by R/Gunner. At 5050N.0625E. 1940 hrs, 15,000 ft, another jet fighter came from astern and was fired at by R/G and burst into flames. Both aircraft were see to crash and were claimed as destroyed. No damage to own a/c or casualties."

Aircraft "M" was Halifax Mk.III MZ366/NP-M, which was being flown by F/O F. M. Compton. The claim for the "kill" was made by Sgt. G. Pike, his rear gunner, whose engagement was included in the No.158 Sqdn summary:

"At 5100N.0640E., 1936 hrs, 15,000 [feet] R/G fired on jet a/c which came in from astern. At 250 yards it burst into flames and fell in small pieces. Claimed destroyed."[251]

If the *Luftwaffe* was trialling an experimental jet night-fighter that evening, it was not very successful. At least three had been claimed as destroyed and a fourth damaged, an event which would have featured in any history of a jet type used in late 1944. Yet no information regarding the Germans using or losing aircraft in this fashion has ever appeared.

Crews from No.51 and No.77 Sqdn also reported seeing jets that night in the target area, but their units' ORBs only included brief references to them.[252] Yet again, RAF crews were reporting seeing aircraft that had not yet taken to the air at night and would not do so in anger for at least three or four more weeks. Other mysterious sightings were being made on the same evening. On their way back to base from bombing Düsseldorf, the crew of No.460 Sqdn Lancaster PB459 found themselves being shadowed by a strange set of lights, which they believed to be an enemy night-fighter:

"Homeward journey, u/i [unidentified] A/C, 4 lights on wings, 1,000 yards astern. R/G and M/UG fired short bursts."[253]

There was no visible effect from the gunners' combined fire, but whatever this illuminated device was, it soon vanished from sight. Reports of these strange "aircraft", which defied all attempts to identify their types, had tailed off over the autumn of 1944 in favour of the "jet" sightings. Yet here was another one, this time with no less than four lights burning, giving RAF gunners ample warning of its presence. It did not make any sense.

However, arguably the strangest report that evening was made by one of the crews from No.35 Sqdn. F/Lt. K. C. Gooch was piloting Lancaster Mk.III PB197/TL-O, and the ORB summary makes interesting reading:

"About 20 seconds before bombing, aircraft was followed by believed rocket shell. Did corkscrew and de-selected flares, opened bomb

doors and jettisoned bombs. Rocket shell fell to ground and exploded."[254]

Gooch was flying at 18,000 feet when this event occurred so whatever this device was, it was not a *Scheinsignalrakete*. It is unlikely to have been a surface-to-air rocket either, given the lack of progress the Germans were making in developing accurate missile guidance systems.

The first official acknowledgement of the recent flood of jet reports came courtesy of October 1944's *Operational Research Section Report No.115*, which, although listing that month's information, also included a couple of lines about sightings at the beginning of November. However, it seemed to concentrate on the wrong night:

"Mosquitoes first reported sighting jet-propelled fighters on the 3/4th and they were subsequently reported on several nights. None have attempted to attack so far."[255]

Whoever had compiled the report was clearly unaware of the Mosquito sightings on the evening of the 1st or the larger number on the 2nd. Looking through the Light Night Striking Force squadron files, there are no reports of jets for the night of the 3/4th, but one does appear in the listings for No.128 Sqdn for the following evening's raids. Mosquito B Mk.XVI MM194/M5-K, flown by F/O H. E. Boulter, was one of nine aircraft sent out against Hanover by the unit on the early evening of the 4th. Boulter and his navigator, Sgt. J. H. Churcher, saw a *"jet seen near Bremen"*.[256]

Elsewhere, there were plenty of encounters on the night of the 4/5th. According to the authors of *Nachtjagd War Diaries Volume 2*, between the Ruhr and Aachen, bomber crews reported some 34 encounters with "jets", of which 21 were claimed as shot down by their gunners. "Twin jets" were listed in five of the reports, which heavily suggested that Me 262s were being fielded at last in the night-fighter role, and three of these apparently opened fire at the

bombers.[257] P/O L. J. Case was a pilot serving with No.408 ("Goose") Sqdn at Linton-on-Ouse in North Yorkshire, part of No.6 Group. According to the squadron's ORB for November 1944, Case was flying Halifax Mk.VII NP714/EQ-V as part of the second wave of bombers hitting the target that night. A brief entry describes what occurred:

"This aircraft was attacked by a jet or rocket plane at a position 5105 N 0652 E at 1949 hours while at 17,000 feet. Both gunners claim this aircraft as destroyed."[258]

The engagement occurred at a position roughly halfway between Aachen and Dusseldorf. F/Sgt. T. Romanchuk was the aircraft's mid-upper gunner whilst F/Sgt. Daniel Shutka was in the Halifax's rear turret. No combat reports for No.408 Sqdn for that raid have been archived, although given that most of the RAF engagement reports do not go beyond early October 1944, that is not unusual. It does however make finding out more details about the enemy "aircraft" that much harder. No other aircraft from the unit reported seeing a jet or rocket-powered aircraft that night, and crews from No.419, No.420, No.424 and No.425 Sqdns from the same Group failed to see anything either.

However, another Canadian squadron that reported successful "kills" against suspected *Luftwaffe* jet or rocket-powered aircraft that evening was No.428 ("Ghost") Sqdn, based at RAF Middleton St. George (now known as Teesside Airport). The unit sent sixteen of its Lancasters out to Bochum and the mission report made by the crew of KB763/NA-S, flown by P/O H. W. Walker, was rather interesting. It does not appear in the typed record, but is a hand-written card stuck to the relevant page with tape:

"4.11.44: Aircraft 'S' had a combat at 5048N 0610E at 2001 hours, 9,000 feet with a ME 163 seen in S/L [searchlight] glare, came in from starboard quarter down, rear gunner opened fire at 500 yards & burst of 200 rounds was fired. Enemy aircraft burst into flames and

dived. R/G fired another burst of 100 rounds. WOP/AG [wireless operator/air gunner, in front turret] and Mid Upper Gunner saw enemy aircraft falling in flames, hit the deck and explode. Claim destroyed."[259]

F/Sgt. B. Rambs was the rear gunner who claimed the "Me 163", and his actions were described as "a cracking good show" by Wg. Cdr. A. C. Hull, the squadron's commanding officer.[260] However, the Canadian gunners were not shooting at a Me 163 *Komet*. The rocket-powered interceptors were never flown at night. In addition, 50.48N 06.10E is located just north of Malmedy, in the Ardennes area of Belgium. This was around 280 miles away from Brandis, where the only operational *Komet* base was located in November 1944. The fuel carried by an Me 163 would not have allowed its pilot to reach the Belgian border, let alone enter into combat with a Lancaster bomber some miles beyond it. What type of fast-moving object was witnessed instead of one of these interceptors? An isolated case of gunners seeing things would have been acceptable, but the Bochum mission involved numerous accounts of "jets" when these machines were not yet available for night operations. Something else was going on in the skies over the Ruhr that evening. However, it was not the only *Komet* claimed as destroyed that night. One of No.462 Sqdn's crews also told their debriefing officers that they had downed one too.[261]

Several crews belonging to No.625 Sqdn based at RAF Kelstern in Lincolnshire also reported seeing jet-propelled aircraft during the Bochum raid. According to the unit's ORB, Lancaster Mk.I PB736, flown by F/O Clem Koder, was attacked by no less than two of these machines:

"After a brief engagement, this aircraft shot down one of these aircraft down, and claimed it as a 'kill', the other aircraft breaking off the attack."

The two gunners onboard the Lancaster were F/Sgt. Sheehan in the mid-upper turret and F/Sgt. Bower in the rear gun position.[262] As at least one “kill” was reported here, combat reports would have been submitted by the gunner(s) involved. However, no files are available for members of No.625 Sqdn after August 1944, although again the absence of huge tranches of RAF Bomber Command combat reports is a known problem in terms of the records that were kept after the war’s end. Most of the combat reports after that month are missing from the archives.

No. 550 Sqdn based at North Killingholme in Lincolnshire sent twenty-six Lancasters to Bochum. The German night-fighter defences apparently made an appearance when the bombers were over the target, and the details of several engagements were recorded in the squadron’s ORB. Once again, the gunners believed they were shooting at jet aircraft, even though according to *Luftwaffe* records, the first jet night-fighter unit was still not yet operational. The No.550 Sqdn ORB for 4th November 1944 lists plenty of detail about the encounters, with the aircraft captain’s name being used instead of the individual gunners’ names for each engagement:

“Hun night-fighters made a strong reaction and fighter flares were seen from the Dutch coast onwards. Many combats took place in which the following aircraft of 550 Squadron were involved, “B2” (F/O Whynacht) had 4 encounters and claims to have destroyed 2 aircraft and damaged another, whilst the other was inconclusive. All these appeared to be jet-propelled aircraft.”[263]

F/O Kelly Whynacht was a Canadian who had transferred to No.550 Sqdn on 15th October 1944 and was flying Lancaster Mk.I NF932/BQ-B2 on the Bochum raid. His rear and mid-upper turret gunners, Sgt. A. Pattison and Sgt. L. Hutchings, also hailed from Canada. Whilst the ORB states that one or both of them had accounted for the two “kills” and a third damaged, there are no AIR 50 combat reports available for that night. There were more claims of

jet aircraft sightings, although Air Intelligence staff did not seem totally convinced that they had been encountered:

"'M' (F/O McCarthy) and 'P' (P/O Franklyn) both opened fire on two jet planes but no claims were made, and the encounters were inconclusive. 'V' (F/O Blackler) claims to have shot down an aircraft believed to be a jet propelled unit. The appearance of jet propelled, and other rocket phenomenon is only of recent origin, and these claims are being further investigated, meanwhile these claims are accepted with reserve."[264]

F/O Leonard McCarthy was flying Lancaster Mk.III PB562/BQ-M. He and his crew failed to return from a mission to Gelsenkirchen two nights later, the aircraft being brought down in the target area. P/O Reginald Patrick Franklyn was in Mk.III PD313/BQ-P. As no claims were made by at least two of the crews at the time, combat reports should not have resulted, although given the interest that would have been shown in reports of jet-propelled night-fighters, it is not surprising that details of these two combats were included in the ORB. It is not known whether or not a report was submitted by F/O Blackler's gunner. However, given that the *Luftwaffe* were yet to field any operational jet night-fighters until at least the final week of that month, it is difficult to understand just how gunners could have seen them, let alone shot them down.

Combats with suspected jet aircraft appears in No.103 Sqdn's official mission report for the same raid. It mentions jet aircraft in connection with Bochum on 4th November 1944, although clearly there was some doubt, either in the minds of the crews or more likely, the unit's intelligence officers, as the word "believed" is used. Although F/O L. Dale's gunners in Lancaster Mk.III NG173 claimed to have shot one "jet" down, presumed destroyed, the relevant reports are not present in the National Archives.[265]

No.103 Sqdn was not the only unit from No.1 Group, Bomber Command to report such machines that night, as there are also entries in No.576 and No.100 Sqdn's records as well. Rather than

providing individual aircraft mission reports, both units' intelligence staff appeared to take the easier option of simply giving an overall summary for each raid, followed by notes on individual bomb release times and altitudes. However, the reference to enemy jets is clear from this entry included in the No.100 Sqdn ORB:

"One aircraft fired on a single jet aircraft which overtook him, and which then broke away without returning fire."[266]

It is probably a measure of the importance bestowed upon this sighting by the squadron's intelligence staff that the ORB for that raid mentioned the pilot of the aircraft involved. However, with the benefit of hindsight, no German jet could have been fired upon at night by Dale's gunners on that date. Was it a fast moving light, a jet, or an object mistaken for one, given that their combat debut at night had been expected for some time?

P/O Fludder, another No.100 Sqdn pilot, was flying Lancaster Mk.III PB569/HW-Y that same evening. Fifteen minutes after dropping their bombs on Bochum, the following was reported:

"On homeward journey at 1956 hours MU/Gunner fired two bursts at single jet enemy aircraft which overhauled Lanc. and then broke away without returning fire."[267]

The mid-upper gunner involved was a Canadian, Sgt. J. Green. Another mysterious "jet" was claimed as destroyed by gunners from No.76 Sqdn during the same raid, although the individual aircraft details and therefore the aircrew names are unknown.[268] It should come as no surprise by now to learn that I have been unable to locate any AIR 50 combat report files that may have resulted from these engagements, so no further details are available. However, they were further reports of German jet aircraft which had not yet begun night operations.

Squadrons belonging to No.4 Group also saw mysterious jet fighters in the skies over Germany that evening. No.158 Sqdn also

participated in the Bochum raid and definitely came into contact with the unknown, as reported in their ORB for November 1944:

“A considerable number of what were believed to have been jet fighters was seen. Four aircraft had combats including one aircraft which reported seven attacks, but in no case were jet fighters seen to fire. Four jet fighters are claimed as destroyed by aircraft F, J & M and W claims one damaged.”

Whilst aircrew were clearly expecting to see jet fighters at night, given that they had already been encountered by American bombers during daylight raids, it may not have been much of a stretch to see them start appearing in the official records of night bomber units. However, the first of the four No.158 Sqdn mission summaries suggested that something completely different was being seen here, an object which was not a jet. P/O N. C. Gordon was piloting Halifax NR190/NP-F on the Bochum mission with an all-Canadian crew onboard. His gunners, Sgt. J. E. Hyde and W/O L. A. Pye, witnessed the following:

“Two jet fighters claimed destroyed over target area. Described as ‘objects emitting white light’. No fire from fighters.”

An identical description was given by P/O Compton’s crew flying in Halifax MZ366/NP-M *Lili Marlene*, with his rear gunner, Sgt. Pike claiming the “kill” once again:

“One jet fighter – described as ‘object emitting white light’ – was hit and blown up over target area. Did not fire at own a/c.”

It was strange to read that instead of a positive identification of “jets”, the “fighters” had been described as simply “objects”, ones that were emitting white light. This was decidedly un-jet fighter-like. In addition, if these had been *Luftwaffe* jet aircraft conducting night missions, they were completely ineffective in attacking RAF bombers. The crew of Halifax LV940/NP-J saw a “supposed jet fighter” over the

target area and this was fired on by the bomber's gunners, Sgt. G. Towers and Sgt. F. McCarten, and it then "blew up". Both of the gunners agreed to "share the spoils" in terms of claims. F/Sgt. J. Marsh-Jones and his crew in NR177/NP-W encountered a fourth "jet fighter" which was fired upon and claimed as "damaged".[269]

The evening of 4th November, together with the early hours of the 5th, was still not finished with tales of mystery jet sightings. At around 1940 hours on the former, the gunners of F/Lt. H. Winder's Lancaster Mk.III, PB411/UM-Y2, one of No.626 Sqdn's aircraft, claimed a *Luftwaffe* jet shot down just a few minutes after raiding Bochum::

"Believed jet propelled aircraft – claimed destroyed."[270]

Unfortunately, the combat reports are not present for the squadron after the end of August 1944, so more information about this engagement is not available. However, the summary section of the unit's ORB states that the rear gunner, P/O W. G. Green, opened fire on an unidentified jet propelled aircraft and successfully shot it down. The air combat report may not have had much more to say on the matter in any case. Given that the Me 262 was not yet flying at night, what had Green opened fire on and shot down?

The absence of the official combat reports for the above encounters deprives us of potentially useful details regarding these mystery jet aircraft. However, I did manage to locate an interesting report made on the same night by F/Lt. T. S. Kilpatrick from No.77 Sqdn. He was the pilot of Halifax Mk.III MZ545/KN-Z on the Bochum raid. The squadron's ORB mission summary for Kilpatrick's crew simply mentions the following:

"Jet propelled aircraft was shot down in the target area west of Bochum."[271]

This would have just been another curious sighting made during the raid, save for the fact that I managed to dig up the combat report

submitted by F/Lt. Kilpatrick after he returned to base:

"First indication of attack was orange plume of flame coming up from the starboard quarter down, range about 800 yards, and overtaking at high speed. Mid-Upper [gunner] warned pilot and gave evasive action corkscrew starboard. Object was unable to continue attack owing to high speed. Mid-upper fired two short bursts (3 secs each) as object broke away on starboard broad quarter. No hits were observed by Mid-Upper owing to intense glow of object. Resume course given by Mid-Upper who then continued his search. Engineer observed hits and saw object dive into cloud. Whilst pilot was diving starboard he saw object which looked like an aircraft on fire going down into cloud. Mid-Upper and Rear Gunners also observed same go through cloud and a few seconds later an explosion took place under cloud."

According to the combat report, the object was first spotted at 800 yards. There was no moon but good visibility, with numerous searchlights being seen in the area. Kilpatrick was at 18,000 feet so this altitude was too high to have encountered a V-1 flying bomb. The location of the encounter was given as 51.53N 06.55E, putting it some 20km west of Bochum, just north-west of Duisburg.[272] An orange plume of flame certainly did not sound like any of the piston-engined night-fighters used by the *Luftwaffe*. This did not leave too many realistic alternatives as possible explanations for the object that Sgt. K. Rodgers and F/Sgt. G. T. Davies, Kilpatrick's mid-upper and rear gunners, had fired at.

The *Luftwaffe's* testing centre at Rechlin was a long way from the Ruhr, and it is unlikely that test flights would have been carried out in the dark in areas that provided the possibility of combat. In addition, "jet-propelled" did not necessarily mean a fiery exhaust was spotted, as the gunners may have not seen propellers on the objects they were firing on and therefore simply assumed that they were German jets. At that stage, aircrew had only looked at drawings of the Me 262 as the type had yet to be fielded at night, and probably a few

hastily-taken photos of the fighter versions over the *Reich* that the Americans were encountering during their daylight raids. In any case, unless the Me 262's Junkers 004B turbojets were on fire, as could frequently happen when their throttles were suddenly thrown open, the engines did not emit much visible light at all, and certainly not an intense one. Yet some of these mysterious machines had been apparently shot down. If the *Luftwaffe* had been able to field jet night-fighters at the beginning of November 1944 over the Ruhr, the fact that they had lost several straight away would have no doubt ended up in the official records, or at least remembered by other German aircrew. It would have also been a major part of the Me 262's history and therefore well-known to wartime aviation researchers. However, nothing like this appears anywhere, which begs the question as to just what was over the Ruhr that night.

In terms of exactly which jets might have been seen during October and early November 1944, the only actual candidates were still undergoing essential modifications to render them suitable for night flights, although at that time they were still not available, despite frantic efforts. These were two Me 262A-1s from *Erprobungsstelle* Rechlin ("Testing Site Rechlin"). One wore the *Stammkennzeichen* (*Luftwaffe* radio code letters) "KD+EA" on its fuselage and the other could have been *werke nummer* (*w/n*, or "works number") 170039, coded "EK+L3".[273] Although the Germans were rushing to get the single-seater Me 262A operational as a night-fighter, neither of these examples, or two further aircraft that were delivered at the end of the month, were in any position to be flown at night at the beginning of November 1944.

According to the *Wochenbericht* ("weekly report") for the period 18-24th November 1944, the earliest point that a Me 262 could have been ready for its first operational mission was at some stage during those seven days.[274] In addition, there was only a single pilot who could fly the type at night, and he was still busy setting up the unit that would bear his name, *Kommando Welter*. There is some evidence that *Leutnant* Kurt Welter was flying a single-seat Me 262A at night on 27th November 1944 and shot a Mosquito down,

although his unit was not officially capable of operations until 7th December. In any case, Welter was at Rechlin teaching his *Kommando's* new pilots to fly one of the test unit's Me 262B-1a two-seat trainers in late November and throughout December 1944. The two single-seat Me 262As adapted for night operations would only be loaned to the unit as well. It is therefore unlikely that *Lt.* Welter, the only *Luftwaffe* pilot able to fly night combat missions before the middle of December 1944, would have been involved in all of the sightings of jets by RAF personnel during November that year – and he could not have been flying all of the jet aircraft that were claimed as shot down during the raid on Bochum. There were no other night-rated jet pilots available then.

If the engagements over Bochum were believed to be simply isolated incidents, the overall mission summary recorded in the No.460 Sqdn ORB for November 1944 laid out the huge scale of what had occurred that night:

"Enemy jet-propelled aircraft were out in strength for the first time, but 20-30 were claimed as destroyed by Bomber Command."[275]

The lower of the two numbers was still huge. Even if twenty jet night-fighters was used as a conservative estimate, the *Luftwaffe* had just fielded a fleet almost matching the total number of machines that would eventually see service with *Kommando Welter* (later 10./NJG 11) during its entire existence, in just one night, and over a month before the unit became operational. None of this makes any sense. The huge number of jet reports for this one raid confirms that something odd was definitely happening that particular night, but the question remains as to what was actually flying around in the skies between Bochum and the German frontier? If the gunners were seeing "jet-propelled aircraft" that were close enough to fire on at least a fortnight or more before the type was cleared for night flying trials, what were they really witnessing? Each crew was cooped up in their own aircraft, without the benefit of being able to communicate with others from their squadron. This should have prevented gunners

being influenced by reports from other crews, or some sort of mass hysteria. Did twenty or more bomber crews completely mis-identify or make up stories of seeing jet aircraft over the target area? Or was something else flying in that area on the evening of 4th November?

Of course, another possibility is that a few *Luftwaffe* day fighter pilots had decided to "freelance" at night and knock down a few RAF bombers using Me 262s. However, these early German jets were not the easiest of aircraft to fly for novices and even experienced pilots during WW2. Given the acute lack of trained day fighter pilots who were able to operate the Me 262 safely, it is extremely unlikely that any commanding officer would have sanctioned such actions. The mention of *"other rocket phenomenon"* in the No.550 Sqdn ORB is interesting and harks back to numerous reports that had been made by Bomber Command crews over the previous couple of years. Clearly sightings of "rockets" were still being taken very seriously, especially those witnessed at night. The final point to note is that this area became one of the main hotspots for "Foo Fighter" sightings beginning later that month, although it would be the American night-fighter crews that reported them. These cases will be examined at length in Chapter 6.

Although the above units appeared to be classifying these fast-moving objects as "jets", the commanding officer of No.51 Sqdn, Wg. Cdr. Henry Holford, appeared to use older terminology to describe what he and some of his crews had witnessed during the Bochum raid:

"A number of rockets or similar weapons were encountered."[276]

Whether these latest batches of sightings were actually "rockets" or "jets" was of great interest in 1944. Suspected new secret weapons were always taken note of, as they had the potential to change the course of the war, even at the eleventh hour. Reports of *Luftwaffe* jets beginning to operate at night therefore clearly worried Allied air intelligence staff. What little was understood about these new "jets" occupied a whole section of November 1944's Operational Research

Section report drafted by Bomber Command. Titled *“A New Phenomena”*, it is reproduced here in full as follows:

“A new phenomena was first reported by crews of 6 Group after their attack on Oberhausen on the 1/2nd and was confirmed by the experience of other Groups on the next few nights, particularly at Bochum on the 4/5th.
It was at first claimed by the crews that jet-propelled fighters had been encountered, but apart from uncertainly as to the practicability of using this type of fighter at night, the apparent ease with which our gunners were able to destroy their targets made this seem improbable.

Careful reinterrogation of the crews concerned made it quite clear, however, that some new type of weapon had been tried by the enemy and while individual reports varied somewhat, the following general picture was provisionally deduced from them:

The phenomenon is seen as a light moving very fast. The general consensus of opinion is that no shape can be seen, and no aircraft identified and that the objects do not fire. When fired at by the bombers, a large proportion of them burst into flames or explode. Some have been seen to explode spontaneously or dive to the ground and it is therefore assumed that they are self-destroying. No bombers have been damaged or as far as is known, even rocked by the explosion of these bodies.

A tentative opinion is that they may be robot projectiles, possibly of the V-1 type, probably launched from the air into the bomber streams. On the night of the 4/5th, when they were seen in the greatest profusion, they appeared to have been sent into the stream, not over the target, but mainly on the return journey west of Cologne. Although bomber losses on this night were heavier than for some time previously, there is no suggestion that the new weapons played any part. There is no evidence of any aircraft destroyed or even damaged by any of them.”[277]

This report includes an incredibly important statement regarding what was being witnessed, and I am repeating it here for emphasis:

"The phenomenon is seen as a light moving very fast. The general consensus of opinion is that no shape can be seen, and no aircraft identified and that the objects do not fire."

Note that these "jets" were seen as fast moving lights, with no discernible shape behind them. Whilst no actual link was made with the "rockets", or the "aircraft" carrying headlights and nose-lights earlier in the war, it is very possible that they were all variations of the same phenomenon. In the case of the "aircraft" showing lights, the fact that the same Operational Research Section report in 1942 suggesting that the majority of cases could not be identified is remarkably similar to the report's conclusion about the "jets" in November 1944. The "rockets" defied explanation as well. In addition to the mysterious "balls of light" that followed USAAF night-fighters over western Germany that autumn and winter, the American aircrews were also now reporting "jets" at night when none were actually operating. This was also an incredibly similar scenario, and it is therefore very likely that they were only seeing fast-moving lights too.

The same ORS report also included witness testimony from an RAF tail-gunner who had fired at a strange-looking aircraft that had apparently attacked his bomber from behind. The gunner's report was supposedly one of three recent but separate engagements with jet-propelled fighters:

"Three combat reports relate to attacks stated to have been made by jet-propelled fighters. In one case the encounter is described in considerable detail, and it is thought probable that the fighter concerned is, in fact, a Me 163. It could not be identified at first on account of its peculiar shape, but later in the attack both gunners and the flight engineer had an opportunity to see it clearly and they were able to give an account and a drawing illustrating its main features. The following is a resume of the combat narrative:

'The rear gunner observed what he thought to be a single-engined aircraft at 300 yards approaching on a curve of pursuit from the starboard quarter, up. He immediately instructed the pilot to corkscrew starboard and opened fire at 200 yards. The aircraft broke away on the starboard quarter, down, at 150 yards without firing and was lost to view. The gunners had been unable to identify it but presumed it to be some sort of jet-fighter on account of its peculiar shape. No jet or exhaust flame was seen. Two minutes later the rear gunner saw what he thought to be the same aircraft at 200 yards on the port quarter level, approaching to attack. He instructed the pilot to corkscrew port and both gunners opened fire. The fighter followed the bomber in the corkscrew, closing to 150 yards before opening fire with short, inaccurate bursts of cannon, using green tracer. It could not be seen whether this came from the nose or mainplanes. The fire was inaccurate, and the aircraft seemed to have difficulty in following the bomber, though it managed to do so for one complete corkscrew.

Both gunners continued firing short accurate bursts and claim strikes on the fighter's fin and rudder. It broke away sharply to starboard at 100 yards and dived through the cloud below. This was the first occasion on which the jet unit was used, and it left a long yellow-red flame which lit up the cloud as it passed through."[278]

It is not known where this engagement took place or which RAF unit was involved. However, the No.550 Sqdn encounter in early November may have been the incident in question. Such information was never included in the ORS reports, but this account was extremely interesting, even if it did include a type of *Luftwaffe* aircraft that could not have been seen in the night skies over Germany. Although tentatively identified as a Me 163 *Komet*, the type never flew in the dark. It also emitted a long white exhaust plume, not a yellow-red flame when under power. Although the RAF report stated it was jet-propelled, the *Komet* was powered by a single Walter liquid-fuelled rocket motor. We shall come across more alleged night-time encounters with this type later in this chapter, and again in

Chapter 6 when American reports are considered. However, the widespread nature of sightings of the type was way beyond its deployment potential in late 1944, and nocturnal flying simply did not occur.

The Ruhr Valley did not hold the monopoly on strange sightings at this time, however. No.178 had noticed odd lights over Slovenia during the first few days of November 1944. At around 2335 hours on the evening of the 5th, whilst on a supply-dropping mission to a site near Okonina, south-west of Velenje, the crew of Liberator KG998 flown by F/O M. E. Sanders, noticed five yellow “balls of fire” which they believed were on or near the ground, about 50 miles away from the drop zone.[279] Their origin was a complete mystery. It was not the last sighting for the squadron that month, however. On the night of the 17th, F/Lt. John Musgrave’s crew witnessed a number of what were described as *“aircraft with searchlights”* whilst they were on a mission to Vicenza. They were flying in Liberator KV276, having taken off from Amendola at 1825 hours. At around 2035 hours, when just five miles from Mestro Point, two flashing white lights were seen, which were believed to be aircraft. One of them also displayed an amber light. Again, it is likely that John Musgrave’s crew saw only the lights and assumed they were fitted to enemy night-fighters, although the types, and whether they were either single- or twin-engined, was not determined as they were listed as “unidentified”.[280] Flying in the vicinity of an Allied bombing raid with flashing lights was not standard procedure for the *Luftwaffe* night-fighter force, nor did they ever deploy airborne searchlights.

Another suspected jet aircraft was spotted on the evening of the 6th during a bombing raid on the Düker aqueduct, located along the Mittelland Canal at Gravenhorst, just to the west of Osnabrück. LL911, a Lancaster from No.61 Sqdn, was apparently attacked by one of these machines. The crew, led by F/O N. A. MacFarlane, a Canadian pilot, saw what they described as a “jet aircraft”. His gunners, Sgt. H. A. Paterson and Sgt. E. F. Koster, both opened fire at the suspected night-fighter and later claimed it as destroyed.[281] Again, as no *Luftwaffe* jets were operational at that time during the

dark, it is difficult to know what the crew of the Lancaster had engaged. The combat reports cannot be found in The National Archives.

The same evening also saw a further report of an engagement involving a suspected jet fighter over Germany. A Lancaster from No.467 (RAAF) Sqdn, PB306/PO-J, piloted by F/Lt. N. S. Colley, had attempted to bomb a target along the Ems-Weser Canal that night but due to the high amount of ground haze, the Master Bomber called off the attack as the markers could not be seen properly. On the way back, Colley and his crew encountered trouble in the shape of two suspected *Luftwaffe* aircraft:

"Had 2 combats, one with S/E [single-engined] A/C, the other with a jet A/C which we shot down and saw it explode on ground."[282]

According to the squadron's summary sheet for the month, Colley's crew had only recently been posted to the unit, and their claim of the jet being shot down was the first recorded for 467 Sqdn. Unfortunately, the combat reports for this Australian bomber squadron from the beginning of October 1944 until the end of January 1945 are missing from the National Archives. However, the number of *Luftwaffe* "jets" apparently destroyed had reached a fairly noticeable level, and yet none of the established histories for any of the recognised types mention these losses. Notwithstanding the fact that Me 262s were not yet ready for operations at night, losing this many jets should have been a detail included at least as a footnote somewhere.

"Jets" were still being spotted in the skies over Germany at night throughout the remainder of that month, despite the fact that none were operational. The evening of 21st November 1944 saw Aschaffenburg as the "target for tonight". 150 Sqdn had operated from North Africa and Italy with Wellington bombers from December 1942 until October 1944 and had then returned to the UK afterwards to reform as a Lancaster squadron at Fiskerton, Lincolnshire, on 1st November 1944. One of the eight Lancs sent out to Aschaffenburg

on the 21st was NG264/lQ-B, flown by F/O Gordon Markes. This Lancaster was one of a minority of RAF bombers to carry “nose art”, which was frowned upon by senior officers, in complete contrast to the American view of encouraging names and often risqué artwork. NG264 was named *We Dood It Too.* According to a brief note next to the raid details in the 150 Sqdn ORB for 21st November 1944, *“aircraft believed to be jet fighter seen.”*[283] However, what is not recorded in the official records is a statement by Markes’ mid-upper gunner, Sgt. Leonard Buckell. In Hanson and Holloway’s *Haunted Skies*, he is quoted as saying he saw *“weird lights, resembling rockets, dashing around the sky,”* which was an unsettling experience for the young air gunner.[284] It would not be Markes’ or Buckell’s last encounter with something strange.

The 150 Sqdn crew was not the only one to witness a mysterious “jet” that evening, as several reported seeing them. One of the reports involved a “projectile of the flying bomb type” which was observed following a Lancaster as it flew over Dinant at 2021 hours. Whatever this was, it eventually fell away and exploded.[285] Given that the bomber was flying at an altitude way in excess of the normal 3,500 feet or so that a V-1 would operate at, it is difficult to explain what was observed here.

On 22nd November 1944, ten days after No.9 Sqdn (in conjunction with No.617 Sqdn) had attacked and sunk the *Kriegsmarine* battleship *Tirpitz* at anchor off the island of Håkøya, near Tromso, with 12,000lb Tallboy bombs, the squadron was flying to Norway once again, this time to attack the *Dora I* and *Dora II* U-boat pens at Trondheim. Both were huge concrete structures capable of housing over half-a-dozen submarines each, although only *Dora I* had been completed by the time of the raid, the work being finished by Russian prisoners of war. Only three aircraft from No.9 Sqdn were among the 171 bombers dispatched to Norway, and they departed from Lossiemouth at around 1700 hours on 22nd November 1944. However, due to a combination of cloud cover and smoke pots being lit by the Germans, the target became completely obscured. Not wishing to inflict unnecessary casualties on the

inhabitants of Trondheim, at 2109 hours the “Controller” of the Pathfinder element ordered all crews to return home without attacking the target.[286] One of the three No.9 Sqdn Avro Lancaster Mk.Is was PD368/WS-A. Its crew were as follows:

F/O J. W. Buckley, RAAF Pilot
Sgt. Kenneth E. Dawes Flight Engineer
F/O W. E. Shutler Navigator
F/O Dennis A. Nolan Bomb Aimer
F/Sgt. I. L. Moore, RAAF Wireless Operator
Sgt. R. G. Round Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
Sgt. Robert A. Copperwaite Air Gunner (rear turret)

According to Keith Chester’s *Strange Company*, details of the encounter were in a “Foo Fighter Report” document provided by Jan Aldrich:

“Flying Officer Dennis Nolan and crew were somewhere over Germany, thirty to forty minutes away from their target area, at an altitude of approximately 12,000 feet. The time was around 2200 hours.”[287]

Clearly some of these details must be incorrect, as according to the ORB, the raid was called off shortly after 2100 hours. The encounter would have been on the return flight to Scotland, but this track would have taken them nowhere near Germany. However, the sighting did lead to Dennis Nolan being questioned by intelligence staff based at No.5 Group HQ at Morton Hall, close to RAF Swinderby near Lincoln, so the details of the incident itself must have been considered real enough to take seriously.

Sgt. Copperwaite, the Lancaster’s rear gunner, was the first to raise the alarm, yelling at the pilot to take evasive action with the usual “corkscrew” manoeuvre. F/O Nolan then noticed the cause of his colleague’s concern for their safety. Approaching their Lancaster from behind, flying at the same altitude, was *“a clearly defined,*

spherical object, fluctuating in brightness, and 'pyrotechnic pink' in colour." The mysterious sphere changed from a light shade of pink to something much shinier and then back again. Although Nolan could not accurately determine the size of the object, he believed it might have been roughly similar to that of a *flak* burst. To the gunners' consternation, it kept well astern, possibly just out of range, but proceeded to undertake a series of violent manoeuvres itself, speeding up and slowing down in what was described as a "jerky" fashion, and moving from side to side. However, it did not appear to be intent on attacking the Lancaster and therefore the gunners held their fire. Nolan was not too sure of the encounter's duration, but at some stage the object disappeared. Some of Dennis Nolan's memories with the squadron at that time feature in Gordon Thorburn's *A Century of Air Warfare With Nine (IX) Squadron, RAF: Still Going Strong*, published in 2014, although details of the encounter on the return from Trondheim are absent. Even the abortive raid itself is not mentioned.

On the same evening, a thousand miles away to the south, the Liberators of No.178 Sqdn were returning to Amendola from a leaflet-dropping mission in the Banská Bystrica area of Slovakia. At around 2205 hours, near Szombathely in Hungary, B-24 Liberator KG835, flown by F/Lt. E. J. Fletcher, encountered what were described in the squadron ORB as a *"rocket fired from starboard beam".* No further details were provided although the crew of another aircraft, KH103, flown by F/O B. P. Taylor, encountered a *"red light seen on port bow"*, just as a Ju 88 night-fighter was noted on the other side of their bomber at the same altitude. Several other crews saw white and red lights moving in the skies at separate intervals that evening, believing they were aircraft, but none were confirmed as such.[288] It was unlikely that the meagre *Luftwaffe* night-fighter force operating over Hungary in November 1944 would have been able to send up aircraft flying in pairs or small groups, and German crews preferred to hunt alone lest they got in each other's way. Air-to-air rockets were also not used in the hours of darkness, so again

the question has to be asked about just what was being witnessed here?

The same could have been said about a single line mentioned in the published history of No.207 Sqdn for a raid on 4th December 1944:

"207 Squadron crews reported their first sighting of enemy jet fighter aircraft, an Me 262, during a raid on Heilbronn railway yards on 4 December 1944, but no combats took place."[289]

Confirmation of this appears in the official ORB but only states *"several jet-propelled fighters were seen over target."*[290] The squadron bombed the rail yards at around 1930 hours when it was already dark, but again there were no Me 262s operational in the night-fighter role at that time. Although the official records do not indicate the individual crews that witnessed these "jets", it is possible that whatever they were seeing were simply more fast-moving lights of unknown origin.

Another "jet" were witnessed by P/O R. C. Yule's crew in No.626 Sqdn Lancaster Mk.III PA990/UM-R2 the same evening. Shortly after they left the target area over Karlsruhe, Yule's gunners spotted what was believed to be a single, unidentified jet-propelled aircraft in the vicinity. No combats were recorded, and the suspected enemy machine did not attack.[291]

These were not the only reports of encounters with mysterious jets that evening. At least three No.429 Sqdn crews saw them too over Karlsruhe, the first of them being P/O C. B. Lee's, flying in Halifax Mk.III MZ318/AL-P. The following entry is recorded in the squadron's ORB for 4th November 1944 and makes interesting reading:

"Seen what may have been jet-propelled aircraft at 1938-40 hours in the target area. Intermittent, orange-coloured flame and whitish sparks were omitted as it went away. Silhouette unidentifiable, no combats."[292]

Although the height of the object was not provided, Lee's Halifax was up at 19,000 feet so it was unlikely that something flying some 16,000 feet below them would have been considered as a potential aggressor. This ruled out the possibility of the "jet propelled aircraft" being a V-1 flying bomb. Also noticeable here is that the crew could not identify what type of aircraft was being witnessed, but it was classed as a possible "jet" in any case. F/Lt. H. J. Hogarth in LV993/AL-M reported roughly the same thing, recording the exact same times and stating it was giving off orange flames and whitish sparks. What gives their witness statements more credibility is that No.429 Sqdn's commanding officer, Wg. Cdr. R. L. Bolduc, saw the object too and provided the exact same description.[293] He was a very experienced pilot, one who had commenced operations with the squadron in August 1944, starting as a Flight Commander and staying in command until April 1945.

These sightings would not be the last for No.429 Sqdn in December though. The following evening, the unit sent thirteen of its Halifax bombers out to attack Soest, between Dortmund and Paderborn. F/O K. O. Powell and his crew in MZ463/AL-J saw a very similar object to that witnessed by their colleagues the previous night, although they were the only ones that reported doing so:

"Saw what appeared to be a jet-propelled fighter about 2 miles away on port bow at 2123 hours, 18,000 ft. while over the target. It was omitting a light orange, elongated spurt."[294]

Under the title *"Number of Combats with Enemy Aircraft"*, the No.426 (RCAF) Sqdn ORB for December 1944 includes details of at least three jet propelled aircraft being encountered on a return trip from Osnabrück at the beginning of the month:

"On the 6th December 1944, Halifax Mk.VII 'Y' LW209 on an operational sortie to Osnabruck, aircraft was attacked at 2005 hrs from port quarter down to dead astern level and broke away to

starboard quarter straight down exploding below clouds. This attack was made by a jet-propelled aircraft."[295]

The suspected "jet fighter" did not actually open fire. No.426 "Thunderbird" Sqdn was one of several Canadian units belonging to No.6 Group, Bomber Command, and in December 1944 was based at Linton-on-Ouse in North Yorkshire. Halifax Mk.VII LW209/OW-Y was flown by Sqn Ldr H. K. Stinson. According to the excellent *Thunderbirds at War: Diary of a Bomber Squadron*, the following occurred on the 6th:

"[Stinson was] at 6,000 feet just west of Lingen when a jet-propelled fighter attacked from the port quarter. When rear gunner F/Sgt. R. Pierson opened fire, the enemy pilot did not shoot back, but disappeared into cloud; a few seconds later, the cloud glowed red."[296]

Whilst F/Sgt. Pierson would later claim the suspected enemy jet as "destroyed", his combat report has not survived. However, the unit's ORB confirms these details, although they are hand-written onto a sticker which was subsequently placed over the original typed information. Pierson had little time to celebrate his "kill" of an alleged jet fighter. Just eight minutes later, the Canadian crew had reached Amelo and were flying at the same altitude of the first encounter. The ORB recorded what happened next:

"At 2013 hrs another jet propelled aircraft attacked from port quarter down and then came to dead astern level opening fire at 200 yards, closing at 100 yds, breaking to dead astern straight down and exploded on the ground. The rear gunner opened fire on both aircraft and claims to have destroyed both of them."[297]

Pierson again claimed this enemy jet as "destroyed", but once again the AIR 50 combat report which must have been submitted with the claim has not survived. Amelo is located in eastern Holland. None of

the night-fighter Me 262s employed by *Kommando Welter* ever operated that far to the west. They were used in the defence of Berlin and did not stray too far from the skies around the capital.

Sqn Ldr Stinson's crew was not the only one from the Thunderbirds to encounter a suspected jet that night. F/O T. L. Layman, flying Halifax NP740/OW-P, had just bombed the target and was heading home, passing just south of Nordhorn at around 10,000 feet when his crew suddenly came under attack. According to *Thunderbirds at War*, the fighter attacked on the port beam at 200 yards. F/Sgt. W. C. Downey shouted to Layman to take evasive action as he began to fire on the aircraft. Tracer bullets were seen to enter the enemy machine and its pilot broke off the attack and started to come apart in mid-air. It was then witnessed diving away and eventually hit the ground, exploding as it did so. Chris Ward's *6 Group Bomber Command: An Operational Record* states that Downey later claimed the suspected German "jet" as destroyed.[298] However, neither of *Kommando Welter's* two Me 262s was airborne that evening. From the point of view of a wartime aviation historian, it is extremely puzzling as to which particular jet aircraft tried to intercept the Canadian squadron's bombers. More to the point, which jets were actually lost to the Germans that night? According to Ward's book, the "jets" were classed as Me 163 *Komets*. However, for the reasons already stated, these small rocket-propelled aircraft would have never been encountered at night, so which aircraft were involved here? Were the RAF crews just seeing fast-moving objects which they interpreted as *Luftwaffe* jets? "Foo Fighters" or not, it is all very confusing.

Canadian crews were not the only ones to have reported seeing odd flying objects that evening. Gunners onboard a No.158 Sqdn Halifax saw and then opened fire on something just to the east of Deventer, Holland, at around 2005 hours that evening. The squadron ORB picks up the story:

"At 2005 hrs, 10,000 ft, 5225N.0635E homeward, M/U/G saw rocket type object come from ground and level out and then close at high

speed. It closed to 200-400 yds and R/G opened fire. In middle of burst the glow went out and very shortly afterwards a large glow appeared below cloud from explosion on the ground."[299]

Clearly the crew did not see the explosion but surmised one had happened when the object fell away out of sight. It is not known what kind of weapon this could have been, given the *Luftwaffe's* lack of operational *flak* rockets. The flight profile described here indicates a level of guidance that the Germans sought to develop but ultimately failed to achieve in their surface-to-air missile project programmes.

Strange objects of the smaller kind were still being seen over Germany at this time. On the afternoon of 11th December 1944, there was an RAF daylight raid on the Urft Dam. No.44 Sqdn was one of the units involved in the raid, and F/O W. K. Dives reported seeing the following item:

"A small balloon, like a met balloon, with short length of cable dangling from it on which was a silver coloured cone inverted, seen when approaching target and 4 more seen over target."

Dives' bomb-aimer dropped their payload of 14 1,000lb bombs from 8,400 feet at 1501 hours so it was daylight when this sighting occurred.[300] The altitude was well within the operating heights of a standard *Luftwaffe Sperrballon* although the description of these five objects does not match the known types, they did not appear to be attached to mooring cables nor did they appear to be very effective if they were meant as a deterrent. However, the cone-shaped objects could have been small explosive charges, designed to detonate on contact with a wing surface if the cable were caught by an aircraft. If so, this would have been a German version of the British Parachute and Cable device, employed to no great effect at the start of the war. Most wartime barrage balloon designs relied upon the cable itself causing damage to enemy bombers. Several aircraft from the same squadron bombed the target from a similar altitude but no other crews from the unit reported this phenomenon. It is also possible that

the strange shape was caused by the partial deflation of a barrage balloon.

No less than four Halifax crews from No.158 Sqdn had encounters with mysterious objects on the evening of 12th December 1944, whilst over the Essen area. Presumably the airmen thought they had identified the culprits as the ORB was quite clear on the subject:

“Evidence of jet propelled aircraft in the form of a yellowish-orange glow which occasionally disappeared was seen over Essen area at 1945 hours, 21,000 feet.”

The official records seemed to indicate that no actual aircraft was noted, just that an intermittent “glow” or a light was observed. The crews involved in these incidents seemed less certain they were jets, as their own wording was different. F/Lt. H. F. Watson was flying Halifax Mk.III NR177/NP-W just over the Belgian side of the border south of Eindhoven shortly after 1900 hours when his crew noticed what they thought was a “rocket”. The object was described as being distinguished by a yellow-white trail. Whilst over the Ghent area at 2020 hours, F/Lt. W. A. Lee in MZ432/NP-Q reported seeing a bright light which *“went up vertically and disappeared”.* His crew believed they had witnessed a V-2 rocket being launched. However, that part of Belgium had long since been liberated and therefore the Germans could not have fired one of these weapons from that area. Ten minutes later, over Kortemark, a town about 20 miles west of Ghent, the following was noted by the crew of NP973/NP-P:

“At 2030 hrs, 5103N.0304E, 18,000 ft, believed rocket seen travelling vertically bearing 035T. Seen as yellowish light with no trail.”

Again, this sector of Belgium had been under Allied control for months and therefore the Germans could not have launched a V-2 rocket from a site in the vicinity of Kortemark. The final strange report of the evening was from F/O L. W. Skipper’s crew in Halifax

Mk.III NR240/NP-N, who claimed they had seen evidence of a jet aircraft over Essen at around 1945 hours. No further information was provided but the suspected “jet” was 2,000 to 3,000 feet above their bomber, which was flying at 21,000 feet.[301]

A further mysterious “jet” was noticed operating in the Arnhem area of Holland on the evening of the 12th, when F/O N. M. McNulty and F/O J. R. Maconachie from No.128 Sqdn, flying in Mosquito PF410/M5-E reported seeing one there on their return from bombing Osnabrück. A crew from the same unit saw another one on the 15th whilst returning from Hanover. [302]

An RAF night-fighter crew encountered a strange light in the early hours of 18th December 1944 over central Belgium. The details are contained in Dennis Gosling’s autobiography, *Night Fighter Navigator: Beaufighters and Mosquitoes in WWII*. After reading the account, which occupies a long paragraph in the book, I obtained the relevant ORB for his unit, although as with many fighter squadrons at that time, it gave only brief details of the mission and in the case of the flight Gosling was referring to, these were simply limited to one word: *“Patrol”.*[303]

P/O Gosling and his pilot, F/Lt. Gordon Hayhurst, belonged to No.604 (“County of Middlesex”) Sqdn which was based at RAF Odiham in Hampshire for almost all of December 1944. Equipped with Mosquito NF Mk.XIIIs, each night on their patrols, the squadron’s crews flew across to Belgium and a new patrol line which had been established on the other side of the “Brussels Gun Corridor”, part of the Allied anti-aircraft defences set up to defend the Belgian capital. The guns were necessary as a result of German V-1 flying bomb attacks on Brussels and Antwerp, which began in October 1944, only ceasing when the last launching sites were captured in March 1945. Hayhurst and Gosling had carried out a twenty minute-long “Night Flying Test” during the late afternoon of the 17th to make sure their radar-equipped Mosquito, MM571, was fit for the patrol flight they were scheduled to fly in the early hours of the following morning.

At 0235 hours on the 18th, MM571 took off from Odiham bound for Brussels and the “Gun Corridor” in order to reach their new patrol line. Halfway across the corridor area, the crew were startled by what Gosling described as *“a brilliant white light”*, which suddenly appeared out of nowhere and proceeded to hold station at a point just forward and slightly to port of their Mosquito night-fighter, despite the aircraft flying at around 300 mph. He did not mention picking up the object on his AI Mk.VIII radar set, so presumably there had been no warning. Although they had never witnessed a light generating such an intensity before, the pilot and navigator could not help noticing that it did not light up their aircraft, nor the clouds around them. Hayhurst and Gosling spent the next few minutes excitedly questioning each other as to the nature of the light, as they followed it through the skies over Belgium.

After chasing the light for around five minutes, it suddenly disappeared. In an attempt to check whether the mysterious light had gone below their Mosquito F/Lt. Hayhurst “waggled” his wings so that they could both check their own side of the aircraft. There was no sign of it. Just as the crew were asking each other what had just happened, the intense light re-appeared on their starboard wing tip, holding station there for several more minutes before finally disappearing for good. Hayhurst and Gosling, unsettled by their encounter, still managed to complete their assigned patrol, landing back at Odiham at 0620 hours. During their debriefing, the pair explained to No.604 Sqdn’s intelligence officer, Sid Phillips (the famous pre-war jazz clarinet player and arranger), what they had seen during the flight to their patrol line. Gosling did not believe it was one of the new Gloster Meteor Mk.I jet fighters (the first of which became operational with No.616 Sqdn in July 1944) as he said it was too fast and there was no exhaust trail.[304] This would have been a correct assumption as although Meteors were based at Manston on anti-flying bomb patrols at that time, they were not flown during the hours of darkness. In any case, the first detachment of four jets that was sent over to Europe did not arrive in Belgium until the end of January 1945.

It is probably a good point in this narrative to look at the question of just which type of *Luftwaffe* jets the British (and American) night-fighter pilots were reporting seeing. In December 1944, there were only two operational types. Two very small units equipped with twin-engined Arado Ar 234 *Blitz* ("Lightning") jet bombers had been operating in the West over the autumn and early winter of 1944. One was known as *Kommando Sperling* ("Sparrow"), and it was soon joined by Kommando *Hecht* ("Pike"). Both units only had a handful of aircraft, with no more than four or five examples being available at any one time, operating in the reconnaissance role. This took the Arados over France, Belgium, southern Holland and even across southern and eastern England, their maximum speed of around 460 mph (740km/h) allowing pilots to leave most intercepting fighters behind in their wake.[305] However, these jets only flew during the daytime, as they could not obtain accurate photographs at night. In addition, they did not carry searchlights, nor the type of special equipment that would be required to produce an intense light on the scale of what was reported by both Gosling and Hayhurst, and despite their speed advantage, the pilot of a *Blitz* would have wanted to keep well out of the way of any Mosquito night-fighter he came across.

In December 1944, the first operational Ar 234 bomber unit had just began flying its first missions over Belgium. Designed to carry three 500kg bombs on its external racks, the jet bomber was a useful addition to the *Luftwaffe's* tactical bomber forces. Around fifty examples were assigned to *Kampfgeschwader 76* ("Bomber Wing 76"), operated by its third *Gruppe* (III./KG 76) based at Alt-Lönnewitz airfield, which was located near Torgau on the River Elbe. The Arados subsequently carried out raids over Belgium, Holland, and western Germany until the end of the war. The first operational mission was on 16th December 1944 against targets near Liege.[306] However, during their first month of missions, only a few Ar 234s were available at any one time due to engine component failures caused by the intense cold and poor quality control in manufacturing and assembly plants. In addition, the Arados of III./KG 76 only

operated during daylight hours, and occasionally into the dusk period, but never in the dark.[307] They were not fitted with any specialist equipment to allow their pilots to fly during the night.

However, between November 1944 and February 1945, trials with two machines were carried out by a small unit known as *Sonderkommando* Bisping, in order to determine whether the type could be employed as a night-fighter. Two Ar 234B-2 bombers were converted into B-2/N *Nachtigall* ("Nightingale") night-fighters, fitted with FuG 218 *Neptun* radar plus a cramped compartment for the operator situated directly behind the pilot. Neither machine appeared to carry out any operational missions during this period. The two Arados were eventually assigned to *Kommando* Bonow, which carried out a handful of night sorties against the Light Night Striking Force Mosquitoes over Berlin in early April 1945. The fully glazed nose created too many reflections and distracted pilots, so the experiment was unsuccessful. In addition, *Kommando* Bonow did not achieve any "kills" with their two Ar 234B-2/Ns.[308] It is therefore clear that the Ar 234 *Blitz* was not the source of the "mystery jet" sightings either.

As in the earlier cases including "jet propelled aircraft" during October and November 1944, whatever was being seen by RAF crews at that time was almost certainly not a Me 262 either. It is virtually impossible that a German jet night-fighter was flying over Belgium in December 1944. After an initial delivery of aircraft on loan from *Erprobungsstelle* Rechlin, the *Luftwaffe's* main testing and evaluation airfield located north of the capital, *Kommando Welter* operated just two twin-engined Me 262A-1a single-seaters in the night-fighter role from the test centre's satellite airfield located at Lärz.[309] Flights were also operated from Burg, near Magdeburg.

Although fitted with special night-flying equipment, the jets did not carry airborne radar. Night flying imposed an incredibly high workload on pilots. Daylight trials using a Me 262 equipped with FuG 218 *Neptun* airborne radar were soon abandoned due to it becoming clear that a pilot could not operate the rudimentary and temperamental equipment at the same time as trying to fly the

aircraft. Any notions of equipping a fleet of single-seater Me 262A-1s with their own onboard radar systems were quickly shelved by the *Luftwaffe*. Night operations using airborne radar would have to wait until the first two-seaters were available, so a dedicated *Bordfunker* ("radio operator") could accompany the pilot. In the meantime, pilots would be expected to fly *Wilde Sau* patrols, looking for targets visually whilst aided by radio messages from ground stations. However, that was still in the future. In December 1944, *Kommando Welter* only had two operational aircraft, and no trained pilots beyond its commander until the New Year.[310]

The Me 262s were introduced to combat the menace posed by high-speed Mosquito intruders and night-fighters over Germany. *Kommando Welter* had been named after its CO, *Leutnant* (later *Oberleutnant*) Kurt Welter. Its aircraft did not stray very far from their hunting grounds around Berlin. Until it became fully operational in January 1945, the unit's Me 262s were based at Rechlin-Lärz, and only landed at bases nearer the city if fuel ran short or problems developed with the temperamental engines.[311] *Kdo Welter* was expanded into a full *Staffel* ("squadron") in January, becoming the 10th *Staffel* of *Nachtjagdgeschwader 11* ("Night-fighter Wing 11").[312] However, 10./NJG 11 was still effectively a training unit at the end of December 1944, and would be into the middle of January 1945. If by some miracle, one of its single-seat Me 262s had been flying over Belgium a week before Christmas 1944, why would its pilot have refrained from trying to shoot down Dennis Gosling's Mosquito, instead electing to fly ahead of it and then maintain station off the aircraft's starboard wing tip? It simply did not make any sense.

Len Buckell, the mid-upper gunner who had seen "rockets" flying about on a raid to Aschaffenburg on 21st November 1944, had his second strange encounter on the evening of 22nd December. As he and his crew were flying towards Koblenz, the Lancaster's skipper, F/O Gordon Markes, warned him over the intercom that a light was rapidly approaching them. Believing it was a jet night-fighter, Buckell prepared to open fire on the "bogey" but before he could do so, it suddenly disappeared.[313] By this stage, *Kommando Welter* was

nominally operational although it had very few aircraft and Kurt Welter was still the only pilot fully trained to fly jets at night. According to Andreas Zapf's *The Jet Night Fighters: Kurt Welter and the Story of the Messerschmitt Me 262 Night Fighters*, Welter was the only operational pilot with the unit until mid-January 1945. He spent most of December 1944 and January 1945 instructing the unit's new pilots on how to fly the Me 262 at night.[314] These flights were also confined to north-east Germany, as the few two-seater Me 262s available for instruction purposes were based at Rechlin-Lärz, north of Berlin. The aircraft were not adapted for combat and therefore were not used operationally. It is therefore difficult to work out just how the RAF bombers could have encountered these jets on missions that flew nowhere near the capital.

No.429 Sqdn were operational during the period between Christmas and New Year's Eve 1944, sending their Halifax bombers out to attack the rail yard at Oberlar, between Köln and Bonn, on the evening of the 29th. Whilst still around 50 minutes flying time short of the target, F/O H. A. Humphries' crew witnessed no less than two "unidentified jet fighters" over Mechelen, south of Antwerp. Whilst the objects' altitude was not given, the cloud tops were estimated at around 4,000 feet and 10/10ths cover was reported over the Continent, so it is extremely unlikely that they were V-1 flying bombs. Another crew from the same unit witnessed what appeared to be a V-2 launch whilst they flew over St. Vith In Belgium, where a major battle had just concluded in favour of the Germans a week before. The launch area seemed to be just west of Koblenz, which was an area used for such operations:

"At 5032N 0623E at 1906 hrs, 19,000 ft. a trace of flame was seen going straight up into the sky about 15 to 20 miles away, from 5,000 to 40,000 ft., leaving a trail of white smoke. It then seemed to veer off at an angle of about 75 degrees heading north-west."[315]

I have included this report made by F/Lt. E. L. Jarvis as it demonstrates how striking and immediately obvious a V-2 rocket

launch was when one took place in view of the bomber crews. The flight profile was quite specific and unmistakable, certainly looking nothing like the reports of strange “jets” and other fast-moving lights that were being made by aircrew during 1944.
However, 1944 had not quite ended for No.429 Sqdn in terms of odd-looking objects. On the evening of the 31st, the unit sent out its Halifaxes to attack the rail yard at Kalk Nord, near Köln. Among the aircraft taking part was DV994/AL-L, piloted by F/Lt. D. T. Magee. According to his after-raid report, he and his crew had encountered something rather strange:

“Over the target area at 2107 hrs., 19,000 ft., a projectile came through the cloud and at 10,000 ft., burst into a long object with streaks of red fire at right angles. It went down slowly maintaining this form.”[316]

Magee’s description sounds at first read-through like a *Scheinsignalrakete* but the altitude it reached was in excess of the device’s ceiling. However, it is possible that by the end of 1944 a few had been “boosted” somehow by adding more propellant. An illumination that drifted slowly downwards was also reminiscent of a set of decoy flares.

The old year ended with another jet sighting, but this time with a twist. Late on the evening of New Year’s Eve 1944, a Mosquito NF Mk.30 night-fighter from No.406 (RCAF) Sqdn was being flown on a *Flower* intruder mission, looking for *Luftwaffe* aircraft taking off, in the circuit or landing at Rheine and Twente airfields. Such sorties occasionally saw enemy aircraft being shot down whilst returning to base after their own night-fighter or night intruder flights. Pilot F/O J. H. Wyman and navigator F/O A. Wood were in MM742, crossing the Dutch coast at 1917 hours. Finding nothing of note at Rheine, they moved onto the secondary target:

“Chased a probable single jet aircraft 5-6 miles N.E. of Twente but unable to overtake. Brilliant moonlight, little cloud.”[317]

The squadron had already experienced one fruitless chase earlier in the month when an unidentified target sped away from a Mosquito, the latter trying to pursue it at around 300mph. Although the visibility appeared to be clear due to the moonlit night, the Canadian crew had still been unable to identify what they were attempting to intercept. It is unlikely that this was one of *Kommando Welter's* Me 262s as Twente was in Holland, much further west than the unit's training and operating areas around Berlin.

Whilst Air Intelligence was presumably still receiving reports of odd lights and other phenomenon from aircrews via their post-raid debriefing sessions, they also had a further avenue from which to extract information. *Luftwaffe* prisoners of war were also a vital source of intelligence, details being gained via subterfuge rather than brutality. Prisoners were allowed to mix in bugged rooms, their conversations being picked over for nuggets of information. Some POWs seemed only too happy to openly co-operate, and even the most hard-line Nazis occasionally let details slip. Wg. Cdr. Denys Felkin of AI1(k), who had headed the interrogation department since 1939, wrote numerous reports after questioning POWs.

ADI(K) Report No.700/1944 of 30th December 1944 included details gained from the three-man crew of a 3./NJG 2 Ju 88G night-fighter shot down over Holland a month earlier, plus a pilot from the same *Staffel* that was shot down over Belgium the following night. Felkin had clearly been briefed to ask the POWs about the continuing reports of mysterious lights and "rockets", as a section towards the end of the report was entitled *"Night Rocket Phenomenon".* The prisoners' answers were summarised in just three paragraphs. The first of these is pertinent to this subject:

"The question has been asked as to whether the Germans are using jet propelled aircraft at night. These prisoners had not heard of the use of this type of aircraft and were inclined to ridicule the suggestion."[318]

Plans to build a night-fighter version of the Me 262 had only been announced by Messerschmitt at the beginning of September 1944. As this "true" night-fighter version was not expected to be ready until the spring of 1945, if not longer, a hastily-contrived interim variant, the two-seat Me 262B-1a/U1, was to be rushed into service. This was a modified version of the basic two-seat trainer version of the jet fighter, but whilst the work was being carried out by *Deutsche Lufthansa* at their Berlin-Staaken airfield workshops, the single seat Me 262A-1s had to suffice as temporary solutions. However, conversion work on these trainer aircraft only began in earnest in January 1945.[319] The first of the specially-adapted Me 262B-1a/U1 aircraft was not delivered to 10./NJG 11 until 26th March 1945.[320] It was entirely possible that even in late November 1944, the crews from NJG 2 were unaware that plans were underway to build jet night-fighters, and that some Me 262s used on daylight operations would soon be re-allocated to the nocturnal role. They would have been told nothing officially due to the German version of "need to know", and it is unlikely that *Nachtjagd* crews from other *Staffeln* would have heard about aircraft from one of the day fighter units being reassigned to new duties unless they had been directly involved somehow.

Keith Chester, author of *Strange Company*, was a guest on "The Kate Valentine UFO Show" (1160 WVNJ, Atlantic Coast Radio) on 17th September 2010. After reviewing some of the information in his book, the discussion turned to whether the Germans could have operated a jet night-fighter force, which could have been responsible for some, if not all of the "Foo Fighter" sightings. Chester stated that whilst jet- and rocket-propelled aircraft were operated by the Germans, the *Luftwaffe* did not have a jet night-fighter unit:

"There were no German jet night-fighters. They did not operate at night, if they did, it was a very rare, experimental, or in a very rare instance…"[321]

Unfortunately, this was incorrect. *Kommando Welter* was operational from late December 1944, and eventually had eighteen single-seat Me 262A-1s plus seven two-seat Me 262B-1a/U1s.[322] Its last night-time mission was on 19/20th April 1945, when two jets were sent up over Berlin and claimed two Mosquitoes shot down, giving a total of just 38 Allied aircraft downed for the loss of at least ten Me 262s. Of course, the *Staffel* did not have all 25 aircraft available at any one time, as delays in deliveries and attrition through accidents and combat meant that the maximum on strength total had been nine jets. However, Chester was on much more solid ground with what he went onto say:

"…these were being reported by the hundreds across a large geographical area, so the Germans didn't have enough jets, if indeed they were jets."

There were certainly numerous "jet" and "rocket-propelled" aircraft reports, many of which are included in this chapter. However, given that 10./NJG 11 was confined to the Berlin area to act against the Mosquitoes of the RAF's Light Night Striking Force, and the Me 163 could not be safely flown at night, never mind operated in the night-fighter role, he was correct in suggesting that the Germans did not have anywhere near enough aircraft to match the numbers of sightings reported, even if the aircrews and Air Intelligence staff were convinced otherwise. Wg Cdr Felkin's second paragraph was also rather illuminating*:*

"They [the German POWs] themselves had seen rocket traces at night and had attributed these to rocket flak; they had had to draw their own conclusions, however, since officially they were told nothing."[323]

The crews interrogated by AI1(k) had clearly seen these odd lights too, and in the absence of information believed it was one of their own *flak* missiles, even if it was a system that they were clearly not

personally aware of. As we will see in subsequent chapters, several *flak* rocket designs were under development in Germany during the war, although none ever reached the stage where they could be deployed operationally.

Bomber Command's intelligence specialists could not work out whether jets or rockets were to blame for strange reports of mysterious lights seen in the skies over Germany during the last couple of months of 1944. Were they any different from what had been seen since March 1942? Details were certainly being included in Operational Research Section bulletins on a regular basis by this stage. The relevant paragraph in December's report read as follows:

"The new phenomenon, suspected to be a jet-propelled missile, which was first encountered in November, was seen again in small numbers on one occasion near Osnabruck. Nothing further is known of its nature."[324]

Whatever the bomber crews were seeing on their dangerous raids over the *Reich*, with hindsight they were not jets, rockets or "jet-propelled missiles". A current strand of thinking suggests that Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon (UAP) occasionally mimic everyday flight objects such as airliners etc. in order to camouflage themselves or blend in with their surroundings as they go about whatever business they carry out in our skies. Whilst I am unable to verify or reject this suggestion, reports of strange jet aircraft flying over the skies of Europe before such types actually did so could be explained in this way.

1945

F/O Gordon Markes and his crew from 150 Sqdn appeared to be a lightning rod for strange phenomenon, as their third encounter occurred on 2nd January 1945 during a mission to Nürnberg. Over the target area, his bomb-aimer, Sgt. Vernon Wilkes, recalled the following:

"Visibility was clear. There were bags of the usual queer lights and flares all over the deck." According to the squadron's ORB for the raid, approximately 30 German searchlights [were] active from 19.15 hours to 19.30 hours when they were all switched off."

The fact that the searchlights were suddenly extinguished suggested the imminent arrival of *Luftwaffe* night-fighters into the area. However, enemy aircraft would not appear to account for what Sgt. Wilkes clearly remembered happening next. According to his recollections some sixty-one years later, which were published in *Haunted Skies*, a light suddenly appeared on their Lancaster's starboard quarter and began to follow them. The bomb-aimer stated he had watched plenty of them before on previous missions, but this particular one started to close in on their aircraft at a steady rate of speed, dimming to almost nothing at times before quickly flaring up again.

Wilkes, whose duties included manning the Lancaster's front turret when enemy aircraft were close, remembered the light coming so close that it completely lit up his turret. However, it then almost immediately dived away from the aircraft and towards the ground, where it was noted burning for a time. The pilot told Vernon Wilkes and the other gunners to open up if a second one was sighted. They did not have to wait very long. Another light did appear and followed almost the same flight profile as the first. Wilkes told Sgt. Danny Driscoll, the rear gunner, *"to have a squirt at it."* His colleague opened fire on the object and the crew watched as the tracer rounds came close to it. Although no-one could confirm any actual rounds striking the strange object, as with the first one, it suddenly dived towards the ground.[325] The ORB for No.150 Sqdn does not offer any help as it only lists the bomb-load carried by NG264, the Lancaster that Wilkes and his colleagues were flying in.[326]

More jet-propelled aircraft were reported by crews in early January 1945, but during the raid on Hanover which took place on the evening of the 5th, No.426 Sqdn claimed two "single engined jet

aircraft" destroyed. The raid analysis included the following comment: *"Jet projectiles were again seen."*[327] However, there was more to the story than merely that one simple line. According to *Thunderbirds at War*, F/O D. G. Hamilton, flying Halifax NA204/OW-N, was at around 19,000 feet on the outward leg to Hanover. Hamilton's wireless operator, Sgt. S. M. Burgess, reported a contact on his "Fishpond" proximity warning receiver, one which was just 700 yards away on the bomber's port quarter. Burgess monitored the incoming "bogey" until the contact disappeared off his screen at 400 yards. The rear gunner, Sgt. W. C. Trotter, spotted what he believed to be a single-engined jet aircraft closing in on their Halifax, and opened fire, the enemy machine descending in flames.[328]

On the return flight to Linton from Hanover, F/O Hamilton's crew spotted a second "enemy aircraft", again identified as a single-engined jet fighter. Once again, Burgess picked up the target on his "Fishpond" radar and closely watched its progress until it was close enough for the rear gunner to take over. Trotter again opened fire and apparently shot down the "jet" as it was breaking off its attack on the Halifax. In light of their efforts, both airmen were recommended to receive the Distinguished Flying Medal. [329] Despite this, the squadron's ORB does not mention the two "kills". The only true single-engined jet type available to the *Luftwaffe* at that time was the Heinkel He 162 *Volksjäger*, and it was still a couple of months away from being declared operational. As with the Messerschmitt *Komet*, the Heinkel design was also restricted to daylight flights. However, the fact that neither the *Komet* nor the *Volksjäger* were available for night operations did not stop crews from recording sightings and engagements with "single-engined jets". This was just another mystery, one to add to an ever-lengthening list.

Another sighting on the 5th involved a Halifax Mk.III from No.158 Sqdn on a raid on Hanover. This was NR240/NP-N, which was flown by F/Lt. T. D. MacMillan. According to the unit's ORB, there was *"evidence of some rocket or jet projectiles being used in the target area."* The individual mission log for MacMillan's crew was more detailed:

"At 1915 hrs., outward and 1921 in T/A [target area], red flames were seen travelling on same heading as bomber stream, with a tail of flame. This was travelling slower than rocket objects previously seen."

However, the strangest report was provided by F/Sgt. W. P. Strachan and his crew who were in NR133/NP-J:

"At 1920 hrs, 18,000 ft. over T/A, a/c was followed by orange glow which went into a steep dive, broke into several parts and exploded on the ground." [330]

Whatever this object was, it appeared to be another of the weird-looking projectiles that for some reason failed to attack the bombers, instead diving away out of control or crashing. If it was supposed to be a secret weapon, it was clearly useless or required a lot more development and testing before becoming effective. Kurt Welter was apparently airborne that night over Berlin that night in a Me 262, in search of Mosquitoes from the RAF's Light Night Striking Force. However, he did not fly anywhere near Hanover and did not crash in flames. Nor did any other jets belonging to his unit.[331]

Another mystery jet aircraft was downed by RAF air gunners, this time on the night of 7/8th January 1945. No.626 Sqdn based at RAF Wickenby in Lincolnshire mustered no less than fourteen Lancasters for the evening's raid on Munich, one of which was Mk.I LM113/UM-P2, flown by F/O L. C. Wilson. Included at the end of the end of the mission summary is the line *"A/C claims destruction of jet-propelled fighter"* and the words *"Combat Report"* are scribbled into the margin.[332] However, AIR50 combat reports for the unit do not exist after the end of August 1944. It does not appear that *Kommando Welter* was flying operational missions that night, as there is a gap in reporting over that period, presumably when Welter was busy training new pilots and not flying missions instead.[333] The

Luftwaffe's comprehensive morning report does not record any losses either.

14th January 1945 would be the next notable encounter featuring the Canadian "Thunderbirds". No.426 Sqdn sent out no less than seventeen Halifax bombers, a sizeable portion of the 136 aircraft dispatched by No.6 Group against the rail marshalling yards at Grevenbroich, around 30km north-west of Cologne. Take-offs started in the mid-afternoon, and it took an hour for the seventeen to leave Linton, each one carrying eight 250lb and eight 500lb bombs. Halifax Mk.VII NP814/OW-U, flown by F/O D. R. Black, bombed the target and was about thirty minutes into its homeward flight when a "Me 163" attacked his aircraft. At around 2000 hours, flying at around 12,000 feet, Black's wireless operator, Sgt. A. Shortreed, picked up a contact about half a mile away and off to their port side on his "Fishpond" set. It was approaching their Halifax in a curving turn which would bring it astern of the bomber. The rear gunner, F/Sgt. R. A. Darke, spotted what he believed to be an enemy aircraft, which was showing a bright, glowing yellow light. By this stage it was around 700 yards away on the upper port quarter. Both Darke and the mid-upper gunner, F/Sgt. R. Stewart, opened fire, all four of the former's 0.303-inch Browning machine-guns suffering stoppages. Darke was able to clear two of the guns and resumed firing. Stewart ceased firing when the "Me 163" was within 300 yards away, crossing to the other rear quarter and presumably preparing for a second attack. However, both gunners lost sight of it and never saw the "Me 163" again. Curiously, it had not opened fire on their Lancaster.[334] The No.426 Sqdn ORB gives a summary of this particular action, along with other combats, in a section before the main body of mission reports:

"On the 14th January 1945, Halifax Mk. VII NP814 on an operational raid on Grevenbroich, aircraft was attacked by a jet propelled ME at 2002 hrs from 12,000 ft. The WAG obtained sighting on Fishpond at 1½ miles range. It was on port side curving to astern. R/gunner obtained visual at 700 yds on the port quarter up, with a yellow

glowing light showing on fighter. Both gunners opened fire at approx. 700 yds. The R/gunner's guns all had stoppages, two of which he was able to clear. The Mid-Upper Gunner had two stoppages, one first and one second. He cleared both of these and opened fire at 350 yds range. Fighter was now on starboard quarter up, he seemed to be starting another attack, but he disappeared from view and was not seen again. No claim can be made on this fighter. The gunners were F/S Darke and F/S Stewart."[335]

"Fishpond" was a short-range radar set capable of picking up night-fighters closing in on a bomber aircraft. As a contact appeared to be seen on the set, the mysterious jet fighter was presumably not just a "light" but evidently a physical object able to reflect radar pulses. Laurence Motiuk, in *Thunderbirds At War*, his history of No.426 Sqdn, calls the "jet-propelled aircraft" a "Me 163". If it had been a Messerschmitt Me 163 *Komet*, there was absolutely no reason why it should have been operating there at that time of night. In any case, the type was not fitted with any kind of bright yellow light as it was not meant to operate night-time missions. It would have been difficult to mistake the shape of a Me 163 for that of an ordinary piston-engined *Luftwaffe* night-fighter, even the Fw190As which had been pressed into service for *Wilde Sau* attacks. The *Komet* was much faster, much smaller and had pronounced swept back wings, plus no tailplane, just a tail fin.

However, seeing a Me 262 over that part of Germany was problematic too. The newly-promoted *Oberleutnant* Welter seemed to be the only jet fighter pilot flying that night, but even though his time was largely occupied by training new pilots for his *Staffel*, he was also operating against the Mosquitoes of the RAF's Light Night Striking Force again. He claimed two "Mossies" and two Lancasters that night in his Me 262, but these were in the vicinity of Berlin and therefore nowhere near Grevenbroich, which was only 30km from Köln.[336] Once again this was a tale of a mysterious craft, described as jet propelled with a bright light showing, creeping up on an RAF bomber without opening fire.

These two “Me 163” sightings were part of a trio included in the January 1945 Operational Research Section report. Together with five Me 262s and two unidentified “jets”, the writer described how the propulsion unit of one of the “Me 163s” *“gave off a white flame flecked with red sparks.”*. He also drew attention to the ridiculously easy manner with which some of them had been dispatched by gunners:

“Seven of the ten are claimed as destroyed or probably destroyed, which suggests that they are more likely to have been some of the new enemy missiles, previously described, which have again been seen in small numbers on one or two nights in January.”[337]

At least one sighting of a “jet” at night during this period was probably just that. The same ORS Report gave details of a Me 262 that had fired on a Mosquito flying at 25,000 feet over Magdeburg in January 1945. The jet fired across the front of the RAF aircraft, damaging its cockpit cover. Fighter flares were also in evidence over Berlin. Both locations were within the limited operational area for the handful of Me 262s belonging to 10./NJG 11, which was based at Burg bei Magdeburg. Although the report did not give any further details, the incident occurred on the early morning of 18th January 1945. The crew of Mosquito Mk.XX KB124/XD-K, belonging to No.138 Sqdn, had just successfully marked the target at Magdeburg with flares from 25,000 feet when the Me 262 made one firing pass. The aircraft’s cockpit escape hatch was damaged and blew off., causing the crew to endure icy cold blasts on the return trip home. [338] Given the location and the date, there is little doubt that this was indeed a Me 262 jet night-fighter. It is likely that Kurt Welter had carried out the unsuccessful attack as he was still flying virtually all of the unit’s early missions.[339] Whilst a Me 262 was the likely candidate in this encounter, it did not explain any of the others that had occurred much further west since October 1944.

No.426 Sqdn was part of the No.6 Group effort against Leipzig on 5th February 1945 and given its proximity to Brandis where the Me

163B-1s from JG 400 were based, if such aircraft had been used as stop-gap night-fighters, one would have thought that at least one would have been seen somewhere in the vicinity of the target that night considering the rocket-powered machine's lack of range. However, none were noted, especially as it would have been almost suicidal to even try.

On the evening of 22nd January 1945, No.195 Sqdn sent fifteen Lancaster Mk.Is against the coking plant at Hamborn, on the Rhein just north of Duisburg, from its base at RAF Wrattling Common in Suffolk. One of the crews was led by F/Lt. A. L. Bird, who was flying PD426/A4-G. Just before reaching the target, his rear gunner, Sgt. L. Abrahams, spotted a *"twin jet plane crossing* [bomber] *stream but below"*.[340] Although the alleged jet was not positively identified as such, the gunner would probably have believed it was a Me 262 night-fighter. On the date in question, the only jet night-fighter unit was still based at Rechlin-Larz, about 80km north of Berlin. This was practically on the other side of Germany, and it is rather unlikely that aircraft tasked with the defence of the capital against Mosquitoes of the RAF's Light Night Striking Force would have been "freelancing" over the Ruhr Valley. In any case, 10./NJG 11 only had five aircraft on strength at that time, plus there are no records of flights by the unit that night.[341] However, something moving very fast and described as a "jet" was also reported by the crew of NG388/A4-R, flown by F/O R. W. Gilliam. This begs the question as to what Sgt. Abrahams and the witnesses in the other No.195 Sqdn Lancaster actually saw. A Focke-Wulf Fw 190 piston-engined fighter was seen over the target area by another crew, but gunners were familiar with the type, and it is unlikely, though not impossible, that a single-engined type such as this would have been described as a "jet".

Further jet reports were received on the evening of 1/2nd February 1945, Bomber Command sent out no fewer than 1,268 bombers to attack four main targets plus several others as decoy and diversionary raids. 271 Lancasters and 11 Mosquitoes were sent against Siegen. Gunners from one of the bomber crews claimed another "twin-jet" as destroyed.[342] Siegen is not too far east of Köln,

and therefore would have been outside the restricted combat radius of the Me 262s. The *Morgenmeldung* and *Abendmeldung* (daily *Luftwaffe* "morning" and "evening" reports) for the beginning of February 1945 are available but do not show any losses in combat, although the jet night-fighter unit did lose Me 262A-1a *Werke Nummer* 170051 near Belzig on a training flight on the 2nd.[343] Once again, another mystery aircraft, one which could not have been seen in the area it was seen in, was engaged by RAF gunners and claimed as shot down.

Combats with supposed Me 163s were still reported into February 1945. On the night of the 7/8th, aircraft from Bomber Command's No.4, 6 and 8 Groups, raided the German frontier town of Goch in preparation for XXX Corps advance into the Reichswald region. No.61 Sqdn sent twelve of its Lancaster Mk.Is against the target, most of the aircraft taking off from RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire before 2100 hours. According to the unit's ORB, F/O Smith's crew in NG380/QR-G did not have an uneventful sortie:

"Attacked by jet fighters and two destroyed."[344]

This may seem as though it was a valid report. After all, the Me 262 night-fighters of 10./NJG 11 were operational by that night. However, the aircraft were identified as single-engined "jets", specifically Me 163 *Komet* rocket-powered interceptors. Amazingly, the AIR 50 combat reports from both the rear and mid-upper gunner of the bomber that was attacked, survive in The National Archives. Although they are rather poorly copied documents, the information is legible, but only just:

"Rear gunner of Lancaster "G" observed Jet Propelled Fighter identified as a Me 163, jet unit was being used whole time and E/A was seen visually, also it fired leaving no doubt as to its authenticity as an aircraft. First attack was made from starboard quarter up and he opened fire as he closed as did both Rear and Mid-Upper Gunners of "G". Broke away to starboard down and Bomb Aimer

opened fire [with nose turret guns, his secondary duty post] – at this time both Rear and Mid-Upper Gunners had stoppages causing them to cease fire. When E/A made second attack, Gunners had cleared stoppages and re-opened fire on Me 163. Bullets were seen to enter fuselage and it eventually caught fire and went down to ground where it exploded – just previous to explosion – AA guns were seen to be firing. Claim destroyed."[345]

Clearly, a Me 163 could not have been seen at night by these gunners in an area near the western frontier of Germany, let alone have been shot down by them. No *Luftwaffe* Me 262s were reported as being lost – in fact there does not appear to have been any missions involving the type that night, so what was attacking and then being shot down? Although the two gunners believed they had identified the aircraft correctly, the Me 163 flew at an incredibly high speed, barely enough for one firing pass on the way up and a second and final one on the way back down again. It was unable to carry enough fuel to do much more than that. At night, it would have been virtually impossible for a *Komet* pilot to take off and then acquire a bomber as a target, position himself for a successful attack before his fuel supply was exhausted, and then land safely again. However, it was not the only squadron to claim an encounter with one of the diminutive rocket-propelled interceptors on that raid.

On the same night, No.427 Sqdn from Leeming in North Yorkshire sent no less than seventeen Halifax Mk.IIIs against the town, but only five of them managed to drop their bombs on the target due to bad visibility. However, this apparently did not stop the *Luftwaffe* defenders from appearing on the scene, at least if the Canadian squadron's crew reports were anything to go by. Halifax NP956/ZL-J, flown by F/Lt. J. L. Storms, was attacked by a "jet-propelled aircraft", claimed as a Me 163.[346] According to the ORB, the following occurred as the pilot corkscrewed in an attempt to evade the suspected enemy machine:

"Evasive action was taken but E/A followed in corkscrew. Both gunners opened fire and the A/C was seen to burst into flames and dropped away, exploding when it hit the ground."[347]

Storms' gunners claimed it as "destroyed". There is a striking similarity to the No.61 Sqdn combat report. On the same night, F/Lt. William B. Brittain, flying NP941/ZL-X, saw what his crew reported as "a flying wing". His gunners opened fire and the machine was seen to explode when it hit the ground. A week later, Brittain (who was promoted to Sqn Ldr in the interim) did not return from a minelaying mission off Denmark. According to a brief footnote in No.427 Sqdn's ORB, *"the gunnery section are puzzled over the destruction of what they took to be a 'flying wing'!"*[348] Checking the missions flown by 10,/NJG 11, there are no records of sorties for that night, so whatever was flying near the bombers, they were presumably not Me 262 night-fighters. Kurt Welter had crashed a jet two days earlier and this apparently left the unit without any trained operational pilots on the type, although some of his pilots were continuing to fly training missions at this stage. However, none of these flights would have been conducted along the frontier areas, near the German front lines. The comprehensive account of the *Luftwaffe* night-fighter force contained in *Nachtjagd* for that evening does not include anything that could be construed as a flying wing or a jet fighter.[349]

No.178 Sqdn's Liberator crews had not seen the end of strange lights on raids from the unit's base in Italy. On the night of 13th February 1945, F/Lt.. K. McFarland was flying KG940 on a mission to attack the railway marshalling yards at Graz in Austria. Just after leaving the target area, Sgt.. W. A. Smith, the rear gunner, reported that he could see an amber light following them. Smith estimated that it was approximately 600 yards astern. According to the squadron's ORB, the following occurred:

"Evasive action was taken by corkscrewing and diving to port. Afterwards, light was observed on port beam. Pilot pulled to starboard, and light was lost to sight – duration eight minutes."

If this had been a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter, then its pilot was taking his time in lining up for an attack on the B-24. However, whatever the light was, it did not appear to display hostile intent. No attack resulted, and the Liberator's gunners did not open fire either.[350] F/Lt.. McFarland's was not the only crew to see amber lights that night. F/Sgt.. Davison's crew in KH209 had watched what was described in the ORB as "an unidentified aircraft" pass directly underneath their bomber. Whilst this might not seem too strange, the description of the lights it was showing certainly was. *"Two amber lights on wingtips on top of mainplanes, possibly a third."* The sighting was at 2007 hours whilst Davison's Liberator was flying at 9,500 feet. The lights may have been all that the crew could have made out with any certainty. Amber lights were also not the standard wingtip navigation light colours in any case, and openly displaying two or three lights did not make any sense for night-fighter operations.[351]

An Operational Research Section report from February 1945 included details of two strange engagements involving aircraft belonging to Bomber Command during a raid on Chemnitz. The first is described in great detail and is repeated in full here:

"The following report, received from a crew of 78 Squadron, gives some interesting details of one of these encounters:- 'Returning from Chemnitz on the 14/15th at 12,000 feet, no cloud and good visibility. At position 5049N 0940E the Pilot and M/U/Gunner noticed that two marker beacons on the ground suddenly displayed a red light superimposed on the normal white signal. Immediately after this, a jet-aircraft of unidentified type was soon taking off close by. The reflection of the jet glow on the runway enabled the MU/Gunner to see that the aircraft had normal wings and fuselage outline. The enemy aircraft climbed with great speed towards the Halifax – the time taken for it to climb to combat height was estimated at 30 seconds – and levelled off to attack at a range of 700 yards on the port quarter, down. The M/U/Gunner ordered a corkscrew to port and

immediately fired a short burst. By this time the R/G had brought his guns to bear, and he opened fire as the fighter moved out of the M/U/Gunner's field of fire. The enemy aircraft closed in slowly to 500 yards, and on the R/G's second burst, exploded and went down in two flaming parts. These parts continued to burn on the ground and were seen by both gunners."[352]

The same report included a short summary of a second sighting that night, provided by a Lancaster crew from an unknown squadron:

"On the same night, a Lancaster of 8 Group returning from the same target saw at position 4827N 0935E a rotating ground beacon and some sort of ground flare nearby just before it was attacked by an Me 163. This is stated to have fired from 350 yards on the port beam, but after fire from the M/U/Gunner, pieces fell from it and it dived to the ground, apparently out of control."[353]

If this were not enough to contend with, a third strange sighting was added to the mix, which presumably related to the No.427 Sqdn ORB entry from that evening which was related earlier:

"A report from 6 Group (Goch 7/8th) described one of these jet-missiles as a flying wing, giving off a yellowish-red intermittent glow, which followed the bomber's course without opening fire although the opportunity to do so presented itself. It burst into flames when fired upon."[354]

What did the Operational Research Section make of these reports? It was clear that the gunners believed that they were shooting at enemy jet aircraft. On every occasion, these "jets" had been shot down rather easily. If they were enemy machines, neither *Luftwaffe* pilot had managed to open fire on the RAF bombers, despite being able to do so on at least one of the two approaches. The ORS could not settle on a single description either, as the names "jets" and "missiles" appeared to be used interchangeably in the same report. If

they were new German secret weapons, they were incredibly ineffective, extremely easy to combat and completely unknown to wartime aviation historians. The Me 163 *Komet* could climb at around 16,000 feet per minute. Although we should probably not take the gunners' reports as too accurate in terms of timing, the rocket-powered interceptor would have been able to start, roll, take-off and climb to about 12,000 feet in about a minute or so. However, no *Komets* would have operated near Chemnitz or, as the reader should be well aware of by now, at night. As a Me 163 can be almost certainly ruled out, the identity of two of the "jet-missiles" is a complete and utter mystery.

If this was not puzzling enough, the sighting of a "flying wing" was a new and intriguing development. Although a Me 163 viewed from above or below could have generated that description, the same could not be said for the Me 262, which was a much more conventionally shaped aircraft, even if it did have slightly swept-back wings. The same would have been true for a much less well-known aircraft type that was under development in late 1944 and early 1945 by the Horten brothers, who were better known for their pre-war series of tailless gliders. The type in question is often cited as evidence of a terrestrial explanation for the "crescent-shaped" devices which were witnessed by Kenneth Arnold over the Cascade Mountains in June 1947, although some of the pilot's initial descriptions of these craft suggested the mysterious objects were "heel shaped". According to one of the legends that has built up around Nazi flying discs and similar vehicles supposedly constructed in the immediate post-war period, the Horten designs either directly or indirectly influenced whoever was responsible for building them. Was this true, or simply another Internet rumour? To answer this, we need to look at the Horten H.IX in more detail and this aircraft is the subject of the following chapter.

The ORS report ended by stating that *"while the details quoted above are not necessarily accurate in view of the difficulties of observation at night, it seems likely that the enemy is introducing a*

new method of defence."[355] The first part of this statement certainly applied to reports that Me 163s were being encountered at night.

Since No.78 Sqdn was the only unit named in the ORS report, I pulled a copy of the ORB for that month to check the summaries for each of the Halifax bombers that participated in the raid. Attacks by enemy night-fighters were starting to become few and far between at the stage of hostilities, due to the *Luftwaffe* running critically short of fuel. There were no reports of enemy aircraft being encountered during the Chemnitz raid by any of the No.78 Sqdn crews, let alone being shot down by one of its air gunners.[356] If one had been downed, this would have been the subject of an Air Combat Report. There are no AIR 50 files available for the squadron for February 1945, although it has to be said that this is not evidence in itself, as the majority of combat reports dated after August 1944 appear to have been lost before ending up in the National Archives.

Nachtjagd, arguably the most comprehensive volume on the German night-fighter force yet published, confirms that there was an RAF report of a "Me 163" attacking a bomber at 0145 hours.[357] Looking through the units and aircraft that the *Luftwaffe* had employed against the Chemnitz raid that night, though, nothing in the area could have been mistaken for one of these diminutive rocket-propelled interceptors. However, confirmation that an aircraft from No.78 Sqdn was involved in the first incident listed is given in the unit's Summary of Events covering February 1945. The report is concise and does not give as much detail as the ORS Report:

"Aircraft 'I' (F/L Teskey) was attacked on its homeward journey at 5025N 1025E by an Me 262. Returned fire with both turrets and the enemy aircraft was seen to burst into flames and explode on the ground. It is claimed as destroyed. Aircraft 'I' subsequently had a one-sided combat with an unidentified enemy aircraft, probably jet-propelled, but made no claim in respect of it."[358]

The mid-upper and rear gunners in Teskey's crew were both Canadian, F/Sgt. E. Hunt and F/Sgt. J. L. Alton respectively, and

they were flying in Halifax Mk.III LL613/EY-I. Chemnitz is around 100 miles south of Berlin, and the bombers' return track from the target would have brought them within range of the Me 262A-1a jet fighters assigned to 10./NJG 11 at Burg bei Magdeburg at that time, although it is unlikely that they would have flown overhead the airfield there as bombers were usually re-routed around known bases and their associated *flak* defences. The jet night-fighter *Staffel* had moved from Rechlin-Lärz to Burg bei Magdeburg at the end of January 1945, although it was still tied to Berlin as it provided the only effective response to RAF Mosquito bombers.

According to *Me 262 Volume Three*, written by J. Richard Smith and Eddie Creek, and published in 2000, on the night of 14th February, a Me 262 night-fighter attacked a Lancaster bomber, the latter's gunners opening up and claiming it as destroyed.[359] It is therefore likely the authors were referring to the mystery aircraft encountered by the No.78 Sqdn Halifax above. Smith and Creek also stated that Halifax crews on the same raid claimed to have shot down three other Me 262s. However, the *Ic-Tagesmeldungen* (daily *Luftwaffe* reports) are available for February 1945 and no losses were reported by 10./NJG 11 during the night of the 14/15th. 10./NJG 11 lost two pilots and their aircraft in training accidents in early February 1945, although this was before the Chemnitz raid, and another pilot was lost during a daylight interception of an American Lockheed F-5 Lightning reconnaissance aircraft on the 15th. From the limited information available, it would appear that whilst Me 262s may have been airborne around Berlin during the night of the Chemnitz raid, none were shot down, which begs the question as to what the British air gunners were claiming as destroyed. The mention of another "flying wing" is also intriguing and harks back to the description regarding the earlier sighting that month.

Apart from the excellent reporting in the Consolidated FLO Reports, the Flak Liaison Officers themselves often went on operations as passengers and submitted very detailed reports of what *flak* was encountered. These are also excellent sources of

information regarding the supposed “rockets” and other phenomenon. Those working with RAF Bomber Command were often Royal Artillery officers, who were familiar with the anti-aircraft guns issued to British units and therefore the nearest thing to an expert on *Luftwaffe flak* weapons that the Allies possessed. On 20st February 1945, Major T. F. Southgate, the FLO for No.4 Group, accompanied the crew of a Halifax Mk.III bomber on a mission to bomb the oil refinery at Reisholz, near Dusseldorf. Although not specifically stated, he was with a crew from No.10 Sqdn at RAF Melbourne, North Yorkshire. Looking at the ORB for this unit, Major Southgate was flying in Halifax NR131/ZA-N, flown by F/Lt. N. Atkins. The FLO is listed as a “4 Group AA Specialist”. The ORB states that the crew bombed the oil refinery from 17,000 feet at 0129 hours, but there is no mention of the “rockets” that feature in his own *flak* report.[360]

“In the Lüdenscheid area, two rocket-like projectiles in close parallel tracks, travelling much faster than an aircraft, crossed well below us (10,000 ft. approx.). One died out after a distance of some 1,500 yards but the other increased in brilliance more like a flare and executed a wide turn before diving into cloud after a distance of about 3,000 yards. Their first appearance was heralded by a small flash and in many ways they closely resembled British airborne rocket projectiles.”[361]

This was a plausible description of a couple of surface-to-air missiles. The turn that one of the projectiles made suggested some level of control, or possibly a fault in its control surfaces. It also seemed as though both projectiles had climbed in unison. However, this mission took place several weeks after a moratorium had been placed on the development of German surface-to-air missiles at the end of January 1945 so that resources could be thrown at the handful of weapons which had a realistic chance of seeing service within the next couple of months. All of the guided missile programmes were therefore dropped, even though the Henschel Hs

117 *Schmetterling* (“Butterfly”) could have been available by April or early May 1945 if development work on the project had been allowed to continue. It is therefore extremely unlikely that these were some sort of experimental *flak* rocket. There are no records to indicate that any *Scheinsignalraketen* were boosted somehow to gain extra altitude.

If anyone has got to this point in the book and has written off the reports of “rockets” as being, well, just rockets, then the *flak* specialists assigned to the various Bomber Command Groups and the two USAAF Bombardment Divisions based in Britain had a different view of matters. This was borne out by a statement included in a January 1945 Flak Report that explained the state of affairs at that time with regard to the multiple phenomena that had been reported for the last few years:

“Scarecrows have persisted and so have the trails of flame which follow our aircraft round the sky. The latter used to be ‘rockets’ and subsequently became jet-propelled fighters.”

This was a very important statement. It implied that the phenomenon had been around for a long time, as the first “rocket” reports dated back to the summer of 1942. The report also suggested that the description of these mysterious objects had morphed into “jet fighters” However, the author, Major J. Nicholson, who belonged to the Flak Liaison Officer Headquarters at No.6 (Royal Canadian Air Force) Group, Bomber Command, believed that the culprit for these new “jet” sightings was a new type of jet-propelled flying wing, one filled with explosives. Although not specifically stated, this suggested that the device would have rammed a bomber or exploded within lethal range.[362] The possibility of such weapons existing and being the cause of “Foo Fighter” reports is covered in another chapter.

More mysterious “jet projectiles” were reported on the night of the 21st, and once again a No.158 Sqdn crew was involved. F/O H. R. Meredith was piloting Halifax Mk.III MZ403/NP-G on a raid to Worms

in the Rhineland area of western Germany. The following appears in the unit's ORB:

"Two jet objects were seen over T/A [target area] at 2041 hrs., 17,000 ft. One travelled same direction as own a/c and slightly below, shaped like torpedo with no visible wings but flames from tail."[363]

Mention of a torpedo-shaped object is interesting, one devoid of obvious control surfaces. Even the rudimentary *flak* missiles that had been under development had small wings attached for stability. However, all research on such weapons had been terminated at the end of the previous month.

The comprehensive reporting of missions by No.178 Sqdn included more tales of strange lights as the unit entered the final week of February 1945. On the late afternoon of the 24th, its Liberators were sent to attack the marshalling yards at Brescia in northern Italy. Two of the squadron's crews witnessed some strange activity as they were either about to reach or were just leaving the target area. At 1925 hours, Lt. W. R. Rowan, who was piloting KH248, reported the following:

"A single-engined fighter sighted, white light in the nose. Climbed from 8-10,000 ft from starboard bow down 90° to heading. Nose light changed to red on passing aircraft. No attack."

About twenty minutes later, F/O B. E. Greer in KH241 reported seeing a red light passing his aircraft in the opposite direction at the same height. [364] The only single-engined *Luftwaffe* fighters operating at that time of the war were late model Messerschmitt Bf 109G-series and K-series aircraft, plus the Focke-Wulf Fw 190A and D-series machines. None of these had lights installed in their noses. There simply was not enough room to fit one.

An unguided German *flak* missile did eventually see service from early March 1945. The *Volkssturm-Flugabwehr-Raketenwerfer*

("People's Army Anti-Aircraft Launcher") was designed as a fixed projector capable of firing thirty-five Henschel Hs 297 *Föhn* spin-stabilised rockets, each one having a small stick of solid-fuel propellant. Designed to be used against low-flying aircraft only, the maximum altitude one of these missiles could reach was around 3,900 feet. The first three of around fifty launchers was delivered to a training unit based near the Ludendorff Bridge on the Rhein at Remagen. The remainder were deployed around other vital parts of the remaining German infrastructure network, and operated by hastily-trained *Volkssturm* units, a civilian force similar in some respects to the British Home Guard. However, none of these weapons could have been responsible for the RAF sightings as the missiles could not reach high-flying bombers.[365]

Whilst it appeared from these reports that the Germans seemed to have had aircraft to spare to throw into the night battle over Italy, the truth was that that fighters could not be spared for that front. *Luftflotte* 2, responsible for air operations in Italy, reported its strength in January 1945 as being just 68 machines, 23 of which were Junkers Ju 87 *Stuka* dive-bomber/night ground-attack aircraft and the remainder being reconnaissance types. There were no German fighter units based in Italy at that time, either in the day or night-time roles. The *Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana* (ANR, or "National Republican Air Force) was the fascist Republic of Salò's air force after the armistice in September 1943 that divided Italy into two opposing sections. It did operate a small number of single-engined Bf 109G fighter aircraft supplied by the Germans, plus around two hundred examples of *Serie 5* Italian types such as the Fiat G.55 *Centauro* ("Centaur"), Macchi C.205 *Veltro* ("Greyhound") and Reggiane Re.2005 *Sagittario* ("Archer"). The number of serviceable ANR machines at any one time was however extremely low. These three fighters were the most potent Italian aircraft of the war, although produced in very limited numbers. However, none of them appear to have been used at night.

Despite this, RAF crews continued to see what they believed to be enemy night-fighters. Lt. Rowan also encountered more

strangeness in the skies above northern Italy three nights later, when flying Liberator Mk.VI KK235 on a mission to attack the railway marshalling yards at Verona West. At 1905 hours, about an hour after take-off, he reported seeing *"an aircraft observed firing rods. Two lots fired at approximately 10,500 ft."* It is not known what these "rods" were, or whether it was a misspelling of "rockets".[366] One of Rowan's colleagues, Capt. Shaw, flying KH155, was added to the list of pilots who had seen an amber light. He and his crew were returning home from Verona when *"an unidentified aircraft with amber light approached from port beam. Evasive action taken and aircraft went over to port quarter and out of sight."*[367] Again, in the dark on a winter's night, it would have been very difficult for Shaw's crew to work out what the amber light was actually fitted to – if anything. Was it another case of a night-fighter stalking victims with an easily visible illumination displayed? This sounded like an implausible night-fighter tactic, and yet the No.178 Sqdn pilot's report was just the latest in a long list of unidentified, possibly enemy aircraft creeping around in the dark, sporting noticeable lights.

Whilst it was certainly possible that the No.178 Sqdn crews were simply seeing conventional night-fighters flying around with lights fitted, a sighting in early March 1945 was clearly impossible to reconcile with what is known about *Luftwaffe* jet operations over northern Italy at that point in the war. Shortly before 2100 hours on the evening on the 3rd, the squadron sent out nine B-24 Liberators to attack Porto Marghera near Venice. Several aircraft from the unit reported encountering a twin-engined aircraft over the target area, identified by at least two crews as a jet. Lt. Rowan's crew, who were in KH403, reported the following during their first bomb run over the port area:

"A twin engined unidentified aircraft came up, head on, very fast. Evasive action taken by diving. (…) Aircraft referred to above appeared to be emitting sparks and white haze from twin units. Was moving very fast. No encounter."[368]

At about the same time, F/Lt. McFarland's crew in Liberator KG209 spotted the following:

"2330 hrs, 9,800 ft, target area, twin-engined unidentified aircraft to port on run up, 9,000 ft, closed from beam, broke away below – amber nose light, went out. At 900 yards mid-upper gunner opened fire. No return fire from aircraft. Evasive action taken."[369]

It is not recorded whether Sgt. Simmons, the mid-upper gunner, detected any hits before the mysterious twin-engined machine finally disappeared.
At around the same time, W/O Struthers' crew in B-24 KH195 noted a *"single unit unidentified aircraft"* passing them from *"ahead to astern at 10,500 ft – red flame and black smoke from rear. On reciprocal course, last seen diving."*[370] More reports followed that night. Also at 2330 hours, W/O Langley, the pilot of Liberator KG940, reported an *"unidentified single-engined fighter observed at 11,500 ft."* Seven minutes later, at around the same height, his crew saw what they believed to be a *"jet propelled aircraft with light in nose observed at 10,000 ft – on a north easterly course."* At exactly the same time, one of P/O Naismith's gunners in KH208 witnessed the following:

"Unidentified aircraft with light in nose on port beam and moved up ahead to within 200 yards, flying practically parallel. Afterwards crossed to starboard. Aircraft then put out light and was lost to sight."[371]

F/Sgt. Davison in EW276 reported seeing an unidentified twin-engined aircraft just north-west of the target area about three or four minutes after the main group of sightings above. He stated that it had *"two dim lights in* [its] *nose"*, and that it approached his Liberator from below. The pilot took evasive action and managed to lose the mysterious aircraft.[372] Jet night-fighters were certainly not operating over Italy and definitely not ones with lights in their noses. The

“aircraft” reported above are a complete mystery. However, possibly the most comprehensive report of the night came from Sgt. Melvin’s crew in Liberator KK235. His encounter read as follows:

“2330 hrs, 11,000 ft target area – on leaving target area sighted single engined aircraft unidentified at 11,500 ft on port beam, heading approximately 220°. Passed to port quarter. What appeared to be sparks coming from single unit. No attack. 2334 hrs, 9,000 ft, target area – unidentified aircraft at 3,000 yards on port quarter, on same heading, white light. Range close but aircraft disappeared after 3 minutes – height 10,000 ft. Evasive action taken. No attack made.”[373]

The final word that night has to be given to F/Sgt. Smith’s crew, however*:*

“Possible Me 163 observed for two or three minutes. Single jet puffs seen. At own height 11,500 ft. Later seen in steep climb. No attack.”[374]

There was clearly something strange flying in the skies of northern Italy that evening, but it certainly was not a Me 163 *Komet*. JG 400, the unit that operated the type, had a very limited radius of action from its base at Brandis, and the aircraft never operated outside Germany (apart from a small detachment to Venlo in Holland for a brief period when it was formed in the autumn of 1944). *Komets* never flew from Italian airfields, and nothing else in the *Luftwaffe* inventory was similar enough to fool gunners into thinking they were actually these small rocket-powered interceptors. The aircraft did not even carry enough fuel to fly from Germany over the Alps to northern Italy. Organising a towplane or dismantling one for road transport was one major hurdle. Arranging for its specialised fuel supplies, plus the trained servicing personnel necessary to ready it for combat, to be in place at an Italian airfield would have been virtually impossible to achieve in the last weeks of the *Reich*. The only jet

aircraft operating over Italy in the spring of 1945 were a handful of Arado Ar 234 reconnaissance machines and they did not operate at night either. What were the Liberator crews seeing?

The following evening, 4th March 1945, No.178 Sqdn's crews were again seeing aircraft with nose lights, or perhaps just the lights themselves. Whilst participating on a raid on the marshalling yards at Casarsa, near Pordenone in northern Italy, F/Sgt. Markley's crew in Liberator KH248 noticed an unidentified aircraft over the target area. They watched it as it passed by on their *"starboard quarter, crossed to port – at 10,000 ft."* It was judged to be some distance away, but even so, both red and white lights were observed to be fitted in its nose.[375] There seemed to be lots of unidentified aircraft flying over northern Italy in early March 1945, most of whom seemed unafraid to advertise their presence. However, by that stage of the war, the *Luftwaffe* did not even field any day fighters in the region, let alone night-fighters, and the ANR was almost finished as a fighting force.

At the same time, but over Germany itself, Bomber Command's crews continued to report seeing rocket-propelled Me 163 *Komets* in the night skies over the rapidly-disintegrating *Reich.* By that stage, JG 400's stocks of the special fuels needed to power their aircraft were running extremely low, and the interceptor unit would be disbanded in a matter of weeks. Furthermore, the unit still did not fly sorties at night. Nevertheless, on the evening of 5th March, a No.426 Sqdn crew reported seeing one of the stubby-winged rocket-powered aircraft in the skies north-west of Erfurt. Halifax Mk.VII LW201/OW-D, flown by P/O J. A. Whipple, was around twenty miles north-west of the city when his rear gunner, F/Sgt. H. F. West raised the alarm. He advised the pilot that a "Me 163" was approaching from the port quarter below. West opened fire, using a series of short bursts, and watched as the suspected enemy aircraft apparently caught fire and entered a bank of cloud without actually shooting at their own bomber. A few minutes later, a red glow was noted on the ground, and F/Sgt. West claimed the "Me 163" as "destroyed".[376] The squadron ORB summary for March 1945 confirms this version of events:

"On the 5th March 1945 while participating on an attack to Chemnitz A/C LW201 "D" was attacked by an ME 163 Jet. Combat proceeded as per combat reports pro-forma attached to Record Book."

Predictably, the combat reports for No.426 Sqdn cannot be located at the National Archives and the pro-forma reports have been stripped from the ORB. However, at least the ORB itself is present and gives the individual mission record for P/O Whipple's Halifax for the Chemnitz raid also provides more information:

"At 2212 hrs 5119N 1056E from 16,500 ft attacked from port quarter below by believed ME 163. E/A identified by wing and tail plane. Rear gunner gave continuous short bursts and E/A did not fire. Saw E/A go down into cloud on fire. Saw red glow come up from ground, E/A claimed destroyed."

Whipple's was the only crew to report an encounter with a Me 163, or any other type of enemy aircraft.[377] This is not really too surprising, as bombers from the same unit did not usually arrive on target at the same time, due to different departure times and an inability to fly in close formation at night. In reality, Bomber Command aircraft formed a loose "stream" that measured many miles in length, with crews often widely spaced and out of sight of those machines in front and behind. This would be No.426 Sqdn's last encounter with what they believed to be the *Luftwaffe's* rocket-propelled aircraft. What the Canadian crews actually saw that night, however, is a mystery that may never be solved.

No.178 Sqdn crews continued to report seeing strange lights in the skies over northern Italy throughout the month of March 1945. On the evening of the 7th, the squadron was ordered to attack the rail yards at Udine. Sgt. Melvin, who had already witnessed a suspected jet- or rocket-powered fighter a few days earlier, was flying KK235 again on the Udine raid. At 2049 hours, whilst he was flying at an altitude of 6,500 feet, he and his crew had an extremely

strange encounter with a couple of lights. The No.178 Sqdn ORB only gives a brief explanation, but it is very interesting:

"Two orange lights approached aircraft from beam, separated and then disappeared. Evasive action taken."[378]

From the above description, these could not have been wingtip navigation lights, as they could not have "separated". If as suggested, they split up and flew in different directions, it is hard to see how they could have been attached to the same object. It is also important to note that no aircraft, identified or otherwise, was reported at the same time. Whatever the crew saw that night did not seem to be an enemy night-fighter.

Two night later, P/O Luck was added to the list of pilots who had encountered an amber light. It was reported closing in on his aircraft's port quarter at around 2030 hours before extinguishing, whilst he and his crew were heading to attack a bridge near Verona. As the light drew closer, the pilot threw his Liberator, KG998, into a series of violent manoeuvres and did not see it again. None of the other crews from the squadron saw the light that evening. On the 13th, Sgt. Melvin's crew witnessed another amber light on a mission to bomb the yards at Treviso railway station. This particular light was flying at their own level, 9,000 feet, but no attack was reported. If these were night-fighters, they were extremely ineffectual as no actual attacks ever appeared to result from their approaches. An unidentified aircraft with a yellow light in its nose was spotted by the crew of Liberator KH103 on 20th March whilst they were returning from bombing the marshalling yards at Pragersko in Yugoslavia (now Slovenia). It was seen to follow Sgt. Saunders' aircraft for at least a minute at an estimated range of 2,000 yards before breaking off. If this was an enemy night-fighter, one wonders why the pilot did not close the range and press home his attack? F/Sgt. Fereday in B-24 KH202 also reported seeing an unidentified aircraft with a light in its nose, however this one was orange. His crew watched as it passed them in the opposite direction, about 1,000 yards away. It turned

afterwards, as if to pursue them but disappeared. The Liberator was at 10,000 feet when the incident happened.

One of the strangest descriptions of lights came courtesy of a No.178 Sqdn crew detailed to attack the railway marshalling yards at Villach in Austria on the night of 23rd March 1945. W/O McCleary and his crew took off from Amendola at 1803 hours and headed for the target using the usual indirect route, flying over the Adriatic for some of the journey. Whilst flying over the Gornje Jelenje area of Croatia at 10,000 feet at around 1940 hours, McCleary's crew noticed the following:

"1940 hrs, 10,000 ft, 4522N 1438E, orange coloured light forming roughly shape of horseshoe, individual lights, omitting glow. Steady white light between ends of horseshoe and white light at other end."

The usual marker flares were seen over the target, but this was not reached for a further thirty-five minutes. I cannot come up with anything that would fit the description of these lights. Another "unidentified aircraft" with an orange light shining in its nose was noted on a return visit to Villach on the 25th, again by F/Sgt. Fereday who had seen a similar one five days beforehand. It was first seen as they flew over Slovenia:

"Unidentified aircraft with orange light seen between Ljubljana and Klagenfurt at 1957 hrs from 11,000 ft. Appeared over port side, closed until direct astern, about 2,000 yards. Own aircraft weaved slightly, aircraft followed for five minutes then disappeared."[379]

Once again, a suspected *Luftwaffe* night-fighter had failed to carry out any form of attack on the bomber. 2,000 yards was at maximum range for the gunners onboard the Liberator to open fire, although too far for accuracy. It should also be remembered that in many of these sightings, the lights were probably all that the crews actually saw. They were conditioned to look out for enemy night-fighters and

as such, any strange light that was encountered must therefore have been fitted to a *Luftwaffe* aircraft.

However, in some cases, RAF pilots and crews were totally baffled by mysterious lights as they definitely determined that they were not aircraft. A “pink sphere”, possibly not too dissimilar from the object seen near Trondheim in November 1944, was reported to have been witnessed by the pilot of No.541 Sqdn Spitfire Mk.XI PL699 over the Ruhr Valley in western Germany at around 1100 hours on the morning of 26th March 1945. Researcher Andy Roberts managed to obtain some details from the pilot’s logbook to confirm the notes made about the sighting. According to the witness, he was flying at around 17,000 feet over the Ruhr Valley, heading towards the Berlin area at 360 mph. He spotted a pink light ahead of him, believing the Germans were using some new weapon system, as he assumed they would have been tracking his aircraft on radar. The pilot eventually caught up with the object and slowly overtook it. As he passed it on its port side, he realised the “light” was actually a ball-shaped object some five or six feet in diameter, heading east at over 300 mph. The pilot lost sight of the pink ball as it disappeared from view behind him.[380]

No.541 Sqdn was based at RAF Benson in Oxfordshire and had been responsible for carrying out photo-reconnaissance missions all over western Europe since October 1942. At the end of March 1945, it was still performing the same duties although targets were confined within the ever-shrinking *Reich*. According to the squadron’s ORB for that month, the only reconnaissance mission that day was operated by Spitfire PR Mk.XI PL699, flown by F/Lt. James Robson. He was detailed to photograph the *Luftwaffe* airfield at Reinsehlen, near Soltau in Lower Saxony, and others in the Berlin area. Robson took off from Benson at 0945 hours and overflew Reinsehlen at 25,000 feet. Photo-reconnaissance Spitfires were painted in “PRU Blue”, stripped of armament to save weight and fitted with uprated Rolls-Royce Merlin 60 engines for extra speed, being capable of 400 mph. However, they could still be caught by the *Luftwaffe* Me 262A jet fighters and over Oranienburg, one of these

aircraft attempted to intercept the pilot during his reconnaissance sortie. There is however no mention of his earlier encounter with the "pink sphere" in the ORB report.[381]

One of the most intriguing sightings in March 1945 was the report given by the crew of a twin-engined Douglas Boston Mk.V bomber belonging No.55 Sqdn. The exact date of the encounter is unknown, but west of Trieste sometime in March 1945, six objects described as "spheres" were witnessed.[382] They followed the crew's aircraft and were said to look like burning metal, but there are no details of this encounter included in the squadron's ORB for that month.[383]

More details were gleaned from former pilot Eric Anderson, serving with the SAAF but attached to No.55 Sqdn at that time. He contacted the noted researcher Andy Roberts with details of the encounter, although he was at pains to admit his recollections were from memory, as he had not retained his logbook when he returned to South Africa after the war. According to Anderson, the crew of the Boston was comprised four airmen. Although he was a pilot, he was instead serving in the navigator/bomb aimer's role, as Dave Urry was flying the bomber. Dennis Evers was the radio operator and manned one set of guns, whilst F/Sgt Murphy was the turret gunner.

In the first week of March 1945, No.55 Sqdn moved from Falconara to Forli. One of the night-time missions apparently flown by Anderson at that time was against a target situated in the Alps, on a night illuminated by a three-quarter full Moon. Anderson described how he had helped to check the bottom of their Boston after landing back at Forli following the mission:

"Together with the ground crew, I carried out a careful inspection of the underside of the aircraft, since we had taken on water from the tail section after touching the sea just four or five minutes away from the coast, where we were forced into evasive action until we lost sight of six fireballs!"

Anderson suggested that the "fireballs" had affected the aircraft's altimeter in some fashion. His own instrument fitted in the bomb-

aimer's position had also shown an incorrect value when they were flying very low over the water, trying to evade the strange objects:

"We touched the water while the altimeter was still reading 100 feet, and the same was true of the pilot's instrument. (…) I suspected that our instruments had been affected by the fireballs."

Anderson stated that after striking the sea, he advised the pilot to climb immediately in case the aircraft was damaged, and they had to bail out over the Adriatic. The remainder of the flight was uneventful, and the crew arrived back at Forli unscathed. As for the encounter itself, the witness was able to recount what the spheres looked like when they first saw them, and how they had reacted in the presence of his aircraft:

"*Visibility was excellent. We were flying along the coast at 10,000 feet when the pilot announced the presence of the flying spheres. The entire crew could see them, arguing over the intercom as to what sort of weapon they might be. We were expecting an attack and I asked the pilot to make a large circle around them at a height of 2,000 feet, the same height as the fireballs were at. There were six of them, each three times the size of the Moon. They lined up like a frayed necklace, but appeared well spaced from each other, the closest about a third of a mile away, the furthest more so, about eight or even ten miles away. They were perfect spheres, with no adjoining pieces or projections of light, or other material connecting them. They couldn't have been barrage balloons. They glowed a deep red as if they were spheres of incandescent iron in the sky, and we were easily able to compare them to the Moon."*

At this point, Anderson and his colleagues were flying over land between Udine and the northern tip of the Adriatic Sea between Venice and Trieste. Although the objects initially appeared to be unaware of the presence of the Boston, this soon changed:

“We had just completed a full circle around them when they suddenly began to move at great speed towards us. I immediately told the pilot to take evasive action. For ten minutes he undertook a series of manoeuvres that we never performed again: ascents and side-slips, stalling, spins and frequent changes of direction. He threw the aircraft around the sky like a fighter pilot. Finally, I asked him to fly low and head to the Adriatic coast, just south of Trieste. Five minutes after we crossed the coast and headed out over the sea, we touched the water at 250 mph.”[384]

This sounded like an absolutely terrifying encounter, reminiscent of the USAAF night-fighter crews who would be chased by mysterious lights over the winter of 1944/45. The case does appear in various databases dealing with aircrew sightings of UFOs, although hardly any details are provided beyond the aircraft type, rough location (“Trieste”) and the month. With the benefit of names, I could at least confirm that the basics of the case were true. Unfortunately, it was not that simple.

I found it easy enough to locate and obtain the No.55 Sqdn ORB for the month in question and find the details of F/O David Urry’s missions during that time. Both F/Sgt. J. Evers and F/Sgt. W. C. Murphy were definitely part of his crew in March 1945, although the latter only flew with this crew on just four missions that month, on the 4/5th, 9/10th, 11/12th and 15/16th. However, the navigator/bomb-aimer on all three raids (and every other one carried out that month) was Lt. G. Liddell, presumably another South African, given his rank.[385] This was very strange. I checked the squadron records for January until the end of April 1945 but could not find any record of someone with the name Anderson flying with the unit. Certainly some Douglas A-20Js (the US designation for the Boston Mk.V) in USAAF service were known to carry additional crew members, their sole duties being bomb-aiming rather than manning the radio as well. Their job was to drop the bombs from the lead aircraft in a formation, upon which all of the other bombers in the unit would then do the same. However, even if No.55 Sqdn had adopted the same

approach, Anderson's name should have been included as part of Urry's crew, even if he was temporarily "loaned" from another unit. As such, the account of his sighting should be taken with a pinch of salt until these discrepancies are explained.

Pinning down the date of the encounter proved to be another headache with respect to this case. If the sighting did occur in March 1945, then it must have happened prior to the 10th, as that was when Wg. Cdr. Lionel Leon, the squadron's commanding officer, departed for South Africa for a month's special leave. According to Anderson, Leon had given the pre-raid briefing prior to the mission that the spheres were seen on, so it must have been before that date.

Notwithstanding the problems I had encountered with the Trieste case, if the Operational Research Section report covering March 1945 was anything to go by, the month seemed to bring about numerous instances of engagements between Bomber Command's "heavies" and mysterious jet-propelled aircraft:

"Only two of the fighters which attacked were stated to be jet-propelled, both being said to have been identified as Me 262s. No claim was made with respect to either.

The bombers opened fire on 10 other jet-propelled missiles/or fighters, 8 of which were claimed destroyed, 1 probably destroyed and 1 damaged. One was said to have been clearly identified as a Me 262 and after it burst into flames both gunners of the reporting Lancaster claim to have seen a parachute go down. Another described as a single-engined jet-fighter, the jet-flame of which was clearly visible, was seen to fire green tracer before it changed course to follow the reporting Halifax, which shot it down in flames."[386]

This mention of "green tracer" was similar to another sighting included in the November ORS report. Whilst some of the "jets" encountered may indeed have been Me 262s, a single-engined one was something else altogether. The He 162 *Volksjäger* was by now

operational, but it did not fly at night either. Something else was being seen by the RAF gunners.

The last full month of the war brought no let-up in the number of strange lights that the Liberator crews belonging to No.178 Sqdn were officially reporting once they returned to base. The ORB for the raid on 4th April 1945 includes mention of a *"red light flickering astern"* of KH406, flown by W/O K. R. Smith. The pilot took evasive action, and the light did not follow them.[387] About ten minutes later, just east of Ferrara, the crew of KH404, piloted by F/Lt. J. N. Reid, also witnessed a light following them, also dead astern. On this occasion, it was described as being "red/green".[388] Reid managed to lose the light by evasive manoeuvres, or whatever it was had given up the pursuit. No attacks were made on the bomber so if it was a night-fighter or a new German secret weapon, it was not very effective. Both of the No.178 Sqdn crews were heading back to base after bombing the marshalling yards at Brescia in northern Italy.

The squadron's days of being a "rocket magnet" were not quite finished, though, as one of the unit's crews could attest during the same raid. F/Sgt. C. N. Hooker had taken off from Amendola at 1833 hours in Liberator KH149. At 2137 hours, the crew witnessed the following:

"10,000 feet – target area - three blue green rockets with silver coloured tails [being fired] from ground in direction of this aircraft. Blue green light came on at 7,000 ft. Then fighter (twin engined) came from port quarter, 500' below, pulled across tail. Rear gunner fired burst and fighter disappeared. No return fire."

About twenty-five minutes later, Hooker's mid-upper gunner, Sgt. J. Picton, noticed the silhouette of what he believed to be an enemy twin-engined fighter bearing down on their Liberator. It had a red light illuminated in its nose. Picton opened up with his two turret guns, but the mysterious aircraft disappeared.[389] Whilst it is possible that a *Scheinsignalrakete* was fired as a distraction just before a *Luftwaffe* night-fighter closed in for the "kill", the amount of co-ordination and

timing that would have been required to achieve such a feat seemed almost impossible. By April 1945, there were few if any night-fighters available for the defence of northern Italy.

More lights followed the Liberators on the 8th, when No.178 Sqdn's aircraft were on their way to attack the Trento rail yards. Sgt. R. F. Jones was piloting KG998 and had reached the Ancona area at 2110 hours when his rear gunner noticed an *"aircraft astern flashing red light on and off. Seen until 2120 hrs and later broke away."*[390] None of the other crews in the squadron reported the light or the mysterious aircraft.

Since June 1944, No.297 Sqdn's Halifax Mk.III bombers had been engaged in dropping canisters of supplies, weapons, and ammunition to various resistance groups across Occupied Europe on behalf of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). By April 1945, such supply flights were largely restricted to Holland and Norway, which is why ten aircraft were dispatched towards the Kristiansund area in support of SOE on the 19th. One Halifax turned back due to a navigation error which put it off the coast of Denmark, but the other nine headed for their drop zones, codenamed "Cropper", "Reins" and "Tail". All of the supplies had been dropped by parachute by 0100 hours[391], the time when Halifax coded "P5-K" was involved in an encounter with a mystery light.

Andy Roberts again discovered details of this sighting, which began with one of the gunners spotting a "star-like" light approaching their aircraft from the starboard side. It then appeared stationary on the starboard beam and finally disappeared, apparently shrinking to just a pinpoint before doing so. The ORB for No.297 Sqdn gives details of the ten aircraft involved in the mission although as individual codes are not provided, it has been impossible to work out which machine was coded "P5-K" and therefore which crew saw this strange "light". Predictably, none of the squadron's debrief summaries in the ORB includes mention of this incident.

According to the NICAP website, noted Australian researcher Keith Basterfield found a recording of a pilot's encounter with a strange object over Germany on his last bombing mission of the war.

[392] A taped recording of the pilot's statement had been made by Doctor James E. McDonald with Mr Kit Francis Williams whilst the former visited Australia in 1967. Dr. McDonald, a physicist, and professor of meteorology at the University of Arizona, was interested in UFOs and personally investigated around 500 cases, many of which had been listed in the Project Blue Book files. having received a small grant from the Office of Naval Research in 1967. According to the interview, which took place on 3rd July 1967, Kit Williams was an Acting Sqn Ldr with the famous No.617 ("Dambusters") Sqdn, based at Woodhall Spa airfield in Lincolnshire. His sighting occurred on 25th April 1945 during the daylight raid on the Berghof, which was Hitler's mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden in Bavaria. Keith's extensive notes regarding Williams' case, and a subsequent one in 1955 which falls outside the scope of this book, can be found at his website.[393]

Needless to say, this was a story worth investigating further, and I wanted to do some digging of my own instead of simply summarising the case here. The NICAP website refers to Keith's original notes regarding the interview, which state that Williams was serving with No.617 Sqdn. This unit is better known as "The Dambusters" due to their exploits in May 1943 when they employed the "bouncing bomb" against the Ruhr Dams in Germany. Once the new British 12,000lb Tallboy and 22,000lb Grand Slam "earthquake" bombs were brought into use, the squadron dropped no less than 41 of the latter during daylight missions in March and April 1945. Tallboys had been employed since June 1944 and No.617 dropped eleven of these on or around the Berghof on the 26th April 1945 raid. However, looking at the No.617 Sqdn ORB for that month, there is a list of each crew that participated in the raid on Berchtesgaden, which was the unit's last operational mission in WW2. Only two squadron leaders flew as pilots that day, Sqn Ldr J. F. Brookes, and Sqn Ldr E. G. Ward. As far as I was aware, neither was Australian. According to the interview, Williams was a pilot but no-one by that surname is listed at all, even in a different rank or crew position. There were at least two Australian pilots serving with No.617 Sqdn at the time, and they did

participate in the Berchtesgaden raid, but these were F/Lt. H. V. Gavin and P/O J. W. Spiers.[394]

I decided to check the squadron's earlier raids that month, but Williams still did not appear, nor did he feature in the list of postings in or out of the unit at the time in question. I also looked at the April 1945 ORB for No.460 Sqdn, an Australian bomber squadron that also participated in the raid on Berchtesgaden. However, no-one by the name of Williams was a pilot with that unit on the mission either. I was therefore left with a number of questions including the main one, namely was the witness telling the truth? If so, was he embellishing a tale told by someone else, had some of the details wrong or was he using a pseudonym? In an attempt to obtain more information, I contacted Keith Basterfield, who kindly provided me with a copy of the audio file relating to the interview back in 1967.

The first portion of the interview immediately cleared up the mystery. Although Kit Williams stated he was with No.617 Sqdn, he added that he was *"marking for 9 Squadron (…) [as] one of the wind finders".* As a wind finder, he would have been at the front of the bomber stream, his job being to assess conditions at the target and relay those details by radio to the other crews approaching the area. This would hopefully allow for accurate bomb aiming. Although Williams stated that No.617 Sqdn was a Special Duties Squadron, No.9 was also classed as one since its aircraft had been modified to carry Tallboy bombs. Kit Williams is listed in that squadron's ORB, although not as an Acting Sqn Ldr.[395] Looking at both the No.9 and No.617 Sqdn ORB files for the latter half of 1944 and the first four months of 1945, it is hard to locate any connection that the witness had with "The Dambusters". He served with No.9 Sqdn since the late summer of 1944, which would not have been classed as a temporary posting.

The No.9 Sqdn ORB for April 1945 does however confirm that F/O A. F. Williams was part of the Berchtesgaden raid at the end of the month. He took off from Bardney in Avro Lancaster Mk.I NG487/WS-D at 0428 hours. His crew were listed as follows:

F/O Alexander Williams, RAAF Pilot
F/O J. Woodland Flight Engineer
P/O J. Lockerbie Navigator
P/O J. R. Gold Bomb Aimer
F/Sgt. L. G. Stenner Wireless Operator (& front turret gunner)
F/Sgt. W. B. Rothwell Air Gunner (mid-upper turret)
F/Sgt. W. J. Reilly Air Gunner (tail turret)

According to the April 1945 ORB for No.9 Sqdn, Williams' final mission was not without incident:

"Primary not attacked. When the [Tallboy] bomb was selected and fused at 0739 it immediately dropped off the aircraft at 48 20 N 07 45 E 12,000 ft 118T due to suspected electrical failure. It was seen to burst in a large wood on the W bank of the Rhine, directly below."[396]

Looking at the time on target records for other aircraft in the squadron, this would have occurred about ninety minutes before reaching the target at Berchtesgaden. With the Tallboy having been dropped prematurely, there was no point in continuing, so Williams turned his Lancaster around and returned to base, landing at 1017. As with so many others, there are no details of his sighting in the No.9 Sqdn ORB. However, in this case we do have the tape recording of his recollections.

At the time of the sighting, F/O Williams was flying at around 16,500 feet near Kaiserslautern, between Luxembourg and Mannheim, with a fairly solid covering of cloud two thousand feet above his aircraft. He had just completed a pre-planned turn at a reference point near the city, the last one before setting a direct course for Berchtesgaden. His Lancaster was now heading in a different direction to the group of aircraft flying behind.

"I was about four to five minutes ahead of the main guys going, the nearest aircraft would be my colleague [the second wind finder],

about two miles before. And the main gaggle was about 10 or 15 miles behind us."

The pilot was therefore flying some distance behind the first aircraft, again on its own, and the main force some minutes to the rear and heading (temporarily) in a different direction.

"Everything was perfect. We had just finished checking the air position indicator which was a special instrument that can be measuring drift (…). The first thing I noticed was this, well 'noticed' is hardly the word as it was just an impression, it moved so fast that it was just an impression, but it was like a great blanket, a woolly blanket, and it could have been anything after four or five miles wide. It was more brown, grey-brown like an old army type blanket. It seemed to be a colossal size I didn't have any idea of assessing the dimension of it, it just filled up the whole of the windscreen itself, both sides of it."

Dr McDonald had asked Kit Williams if there was actually something outside his aircraft and not just an *"obscuration over the screen."* The former pilot replied as follows:

"Well, it when it came, obviously it was flying, or I think it moved in a directly vertical course. (…) Well, it just that was it. It was gone, it was ping, straight through and it just filled the windscreen, gone. And about that time then I felt the slipstream of it passing, I think it would have been instantaneous. The bomb crashed on the doors and through the doors. I just saw this impression of this sort of blanket-like cloud flash up and disappear. And then everything happened simultaneously."

The 12,000lb Tallboy had broken free of its shackles and landed on the inside of the closed bomb bay doors, which were never designed to hold any kind of weight, let alone a bomb of that size. It crashed straight through the thin metal doors and fell away from the Lancaster, the broken holding straps dangling through the gap.

Williams and his colleagues sitting in the forward fuselage of the bomber both felt and heard the crash as the bomb went straight through the doors. As per the squadron ORB, the Tallboy hit the ground and exploded in a wooded area on the west bank of the River Rhein. Before he could assess the impact of the bomb breaking loose and crashing through the doors, Williams suddenly had his hands full with much more pressing problems.

“The first thing that I was aware of really is that the power had gone and that was only a split second after I felt the bomb release. I heard the crash first and then she dropped through the doors, the force of the weight through the bomb bay doors. And then of course the aircraft lifted quickly into the air, and in the process of it lifting, I noticed that I had no power.”

The engines had not stopped immediately, but Williams noticed the rev counters fall as he felt the “jerk” when the bomb fell away under its own accord. Under normal conditions, pilots “trimmed” the aircraft to fly straight and level with the Tallboy in place, and then again once the bomb had been dropped. Losing six tons not only significantly increased the amount of usable power the Rolls-Royce Merlin engines could provide, but the aircraft also shot upwards, the sudden lack of weight delivering a huge amount of lift:

“It’s just like unloading a truckload of wood and the power that you've got suddenly gives you a surge forward and the terrific lift you've got lifts you into the air, bounces away from you, lifts up and surges forward.”

In this case, however, instead of the power suddenly increasing as would have normally been the result of the bomb falling away, Williams suddenly realised that it had almost disappeared. Checking the Lancaster’s trim and reducing the engines’ power, the pilot noticed that the rev counters were dropping. The compass needle started toppling and the oil pressure gauges on the four Merlin engines were falling.

“And then I noticed everything electrical was dead. (…) And then straight away I had no now electrics, everything else is static and fuel gauges were dropping, my fuel pressure gauges were dropping off and the magnetic indicator was starting to twist. It was pretty obvious that my electrics had gone.”

Kit Williams was used to emergency procedures as he had carried out plenty of these whilst undergoing test flights with No.9 Sqdn for about five months in 1944, presumably in connection with carrying the new bombs. He cut the power to three engines, leaving just the one with the master generator still running, as there was just not enough power to immediately place the three unpowered propellers into the “feathered” position, turning the blades’ pitch so they offered the least air resistance. With three propellers “windmilling”, moving without power applied to their engines, a huge amount of drag was created, slowing the aircraft and losing altitude. What emergency battery power remained was directed to the single remaining engine, instead of being split between four, whilst Williams put the Lancaster into a descent to maintain a safe flying speed of around 100 to 120 mph. The other three engines then stopped, allowing the propellers to eventually settle in “feathered” mode, although it would take over a minute for them to do so. With no power available to run the engines, waiting for the propellers to stop rotating in the slipstream whilst still losing height and airspeed was a somewhat risky yet necessary procedure:

“This means a fight between what power you’ve got to use on one engine and the height you're going to lose with the others three windmilling, but there isn't any other way of getting over it.”

Williams did have help throughout these actions, however, as the flight engineer’s job included assisting the pilot in circumstances such as these. The connections were switched off and on, with instructions being yelled via the intercom system. However, despite having encountered a huge “army blanket” flying directly in front of

his aircraft, his Tallboy dropping prematurely and then complete electrical systems failure, Kit Williams still found he had extra problems to contend with, which may or may not have stemmed from their recent brush with something unknown:

“I followed the instructions and I noticed that the engineer, who is more or less stood beside me when he's working, was shaking his head. Really shaking it, sort of dog fashion. I sort of glanced across him a couple of times while I was waiting these long, long seconds for this engine to unfeather again. And right out of the blue, I had the impression then that I had hit my head on something. There was a sudden sensation of a pounding headache. Well, this seemed to get bigger and bigger as I sort of allowed it to register. And from then onwards, between recording my screamingly intense headache, I think the ladies would call it a splitting headache because that's what it felt like, and sort of running out of a lot of airspace at the time, I was fairly busy.”

Despite these added problems, Kit Williams and F/O Woodland, his flight engineer, managed to get each of the four engines started again, by which time the Lancaster had descended from around 16,000 feet to just 4,000. The only remaining issue, apart from his splitting headache, was that the bomb bay’s metal linking straps which had broken were trailing outside the aircraft. This meant that the pilot could not shut the bomb bay doors. Dr McDonald asked Williams if any of the other crews had witnessed what had happened, had seen the “blanket” and the Tallboy bomb fall away. He told him that their crews would have just said *“oh, he’s lost, he’s going down, so what the hell, they would go on and get the job done.”* Asked whether the pilot had talked to anyone from the other aircraft, he replied:

“*Nobody said they'd seen a thing. (…) For example, I don't really know, I think it moved at such a colossal speed which only confirmed the, my illusion of the speed, that no one else had seen it at all.”*

According to the No.9 Sqdn ORB, the bomb had fallen away at 0739 hours[397], so at that time in March it was just becoming daylight, although Williams recalled that it was still fairly dark due to the heavy ceiling of cloud above the bomber stream:

"And as I said, it was a heavy ceiling, it was fairly dark, but daylight at that time. And I think that most of the boys would have been fairly busy at that time, there'd only be the odd pilot who would have been able to see it because no other members of the crew would have been looking in that direction in any case, and as most of them were at the turning point, we had just left it. The majority of them were fiddling around setting compasses and resetting directions and things like that, which means that the gaggle itself, about 25 or 26 aircraft, they all would have been busy, and it's quite on the cards they weren't even looking in our direction, there was no reason to do that."

In other words, Williams had turned onto a new heading pointing away from the one that all of the aircraft behind him were flying on, so they would not have been necessarily looking in the same direction that he was. No-one else would have seen the object that shot past his bomber. The pilot finally had his aircraft under complete control again, although he now had fresh problems to contend with in addition to the pounding headache:

"I found that I was having extreme difficulty in getting my reflexes to operate, in other words if I wanted to do something I sort of had to think about it and talk myself into doing it. I noticed it with the engineer and the bomb aimer [P/O Gold]. I could see him; he was sitting on the step, and he looked as if in his eyes and the part of his face which was seen over the microphone mask and the oxygen mask. He gave the impression that someone had walked up behind him and slapped him hard between the shoulder blades, just as if he'd had a terrific blow in the middle of the back and it sort of jerked him and made him catch his breath. He kept it, it wasn't just a

passing expression on his face, he wore it, it stayed with him. The engineer when he turned around and the same similar expression. And then when conversing with each of them. I found that everybody had a splitting headache. In fact, it was such that they were doing all sorts of things to try and get rid of them. We had special pain killing tablets and we had all sorts of things we carried with us in our emergency kits, and everybody was diving for their emergency gear and taking all sorts of variety of tablets to try and cut down this headache."

The crew of Lancaster NG487 still had one final hurdle to cross, a safe landing back at Bardney. Williams managed to get the bomber onto the runway, but it was not one of his better landings.

"After a couple of hours, made a pretty hairy landing. And finally got out of the aircraft. The ambulance crews came and met us at the aircraft, midway between the runway and the standings [the aircraft hard-standings, or parking areas] because I'd run off the runway about halfway down. I couldn't control it, and I'd run off the runway onto the grass verges."

At this point, Dr McDonald asked Kit Williams whether he had lost control due to either tiredness, aerodynamics, or a problem with the aircraft. The pilot gave a frank reply about his reflexes:

"My own inability to just get things done fast enough. They weren't operating. It was me personally, I was quite incapable of keeping control and operating quickly, reacting quickly."

Later, a thorough check was carried out on the Lancaster, but the only damage found was to the bomb bay doors, all of the other systems were working normally, no defects being discovered. The ORB listed *"suspected electrical failure"* as the cause of the bomb being released prematurely.[398] Whilst the Lancaster was found to be working normally, according to Williams, the same could not be

said of him or his crew. They were all taken away for a barrage of medical tests, plus question and answer sessions, presumably by Air Intelligence officers.

"In my case, ten nights and almost a complete 11 days of interrogation and medical attention. I was first in hospital, and then transferred to Base Hospital at RAF Waddington [just south of Lincoln], then to the Rauceby "Guinea Pig" hospital where all the medical experts did all sorts of things including plastic surgery and what have you. (…) All experimental work was known as the guinea pig hospital. That was Rauceby. Then from there to High Wycombe, which was the Bomber Command headquarters, a few miles out of London. And from High Wycombe to MI9, which was enemy intelligence and interrogations centre and moving back and forth in their various addresses."

Williams claimed that his headaches only stopped at around 0600 hours on the eleventh day after returning to Bardney. He was finally allowed to re-join his squadron and eventually managed to talk to the rest of his crew about their own similar experiences. Each man had suffered from the same headaches, and they had all vanished over a twelve-hour period on the eleventh day - all apart from the tail gunner, F/Sgt. Reilly, who apparently had to endure them for another full week before they disappeared:

"My rear gunner was, he had originally worked in a foundry (…) and he was about five feet two, a ball of muscle really. (…) He was the last one, he went on for three weeks before he was completely clear. And he was about five feet two, and very stockily built. (…) He was the furthest away from what I believe was the source of our trouble, and yet he was the one who was greatest affected."[399]

Were the headaches caused by the passage of the "blanket" that had flown by the crew's Lancaster, or were they due to the sharp descent caused by a sudden lack of power to the aircraft's engines?

Was the mysterious object to blame for the complete electrical systems failure onboard the bomber, and the premature dropping of their Tallboy bomb? The answers to these questions may never be known, although if Kit Williams' account of interrogations is correct, it appears that Air Intelligence definitely wanted to find out the answers, even if the war was all but over.

Dr McDonald ended the portion of the interview dealing with Kit Williams' WW2 sighting by asking him whether he had heard of any other "clear-cut examples of the same phenomenon". According to Williams, secrecy *"and other rubbish like that"* meant that news of such things did not really appear, but he did know of another No.9 Sqdn Lancaster which had apparently suffered a similar problem in the same area:

"And that was in August 1944, in almost exactly the same area, and the aircraft had the same thing happen. (…) They didn't see anything. They just suddenly ran out of all power, everything stopped. And this was night, and they were unable to get rid of their bombs, unload them, etc., and the aircraft must have lost height very rapidly and they bailed out."

I looked through the No.9 Sqdn losses for August 1944. ME757/WS-O was hit by another aircraft's bombs over Brest on the 13th and appears to have been the only operational loss that month. It also appears that none of the raids flew as far as the city of Kaiserslautern, so unless Williams could not remember the month correctly, which could well have been the case, none of No.9 Sqdn's Lancasters would have been in that area to suffer complete power failure.[400] Kit Williams reflected on the interrogations he and his crew had undergone once they had returned home after the raid:

"I do know that on the period of time that we were for a few days and the subsequent weeks that we were taken back and forth to High Wycombe, there were other crews from 5 Group Bomber Command, where we were at the time. There were other crews were taken to

the same areas and they were taken to the same sections of 5 Group for the same type of interviews that we had. And we were given to understand the only ones that went there had to have a problem which couldn't be handled at any other unit in the Air Force, which meant by my simple deduction, is that they must have had experiences which were something similar to ours, otherwise they wouldn't have been processed the same way."

Had other crews experienced encounters with similar objects, together with the same associated after-effects? Williams claimed that this was true, at least in terms of the engine failure. If so, no details have ever seen the light of day. I have been able to corroborate some of the details that Kit Williams gave in his interview with Dr McDonald. The only questionable parts are that he claimed to be part of No.617 Sqdn, and there is no evidence regarding the other bomber in his unit that suffered the same complete power failure over the same location. Williams does state on the tape that he was *"marking for 9 Squadron"* on the day of the Berchtesgaden raid in March 1945, but the official records show that he had been a member of that unit since at least mid-August 1944 in any case. It seems strange that the pilot stated he was a member of the much more famous No.617 Sqdn, when he appears to have had no association with that unit whatsoever.

Alexander ("Kit") Francis Williams had joined the RAAF at 15, as his grandfather had said *"he would never make a doctor".* When joining up, he had lied about his age, stating he was three years older than he actually was. Williams survived a crash involving Airspeed Oxford Mk.I MP351 at Long Newton in Wiltshire on 15th November 1943, whilst with No.15 (Pilots) Advanced Flying Unit at RAF Babdown Farm in Gloucestershire. He stated he was a "test pilot" with No.9 Sqdn for several months, and this may have been over the summer of 1944, as his first operational mission appears to have been against the *Luftwaffe* base at Gilze-Rijen in Holland on 15th August. He was still listed as a Flight Sergeant at this time, but his commission as a Pilot Officer would soon come through and be backdated to 9th July. The squadron carried out a series of flight

tests carrying the new 12,000lb Tallboy bombs in mid-1944, in an effort to calculate the most fuel-efficient power and trim settings possible with the new weapon slung in the bomb bays of their Lancasters. Thousands of miles were therefore flown over Britain with dummy bombs (or the equivalent in ballast) during the summer of 1944, before Tallboys were used in anger. On 29th October 1944, he and his crew were part of the No.9 Sqdn contribution of 38 Lancasters that dropped Tallboy bombs on the German battleship *Tirpitz*, which was moored near Tromsø in Northern Norway. Williams stayed in the RAAF after the war and was not discharged until 1948.

Putting aside the discrepancy relating to which squadron he flew with, Williams' story of a huge object that flashed past his aircraft, one which may or may not have contributed to the premature release of his Tallboy bomb and subsequent electrical systems failure, is an extremely intriguing one. The sudden lack of power may have been a coincidence, although automobile engine stalls were a frequent staple of many UFO reports in the 1970s and 1980s. If a similar effect could be experienced by an aircraft, then sudden power losses could and were probably fatal in a good many cases. Who knows how many crews and aircraft came to grief after an encounter with a huge "army blanket"? Physical effects after a sighting are also not uncommon occurrences: did Williams and his crew suffer headaches and delayed reflexes due to a close encounter?

However, the idea of something that could induce electrical systems failure is also an integral part of a purported German secret weapon, one which according to the author of a book in the late 1960s was behind the "Foo Fighter" reports. We will look at this in Chapters 13 and 14, which deals with two of these alleged devices.

With the end of the war in Europe, the requirement for huge armadas of Allied bombers to fly across the continent, coupled with scores of night-fighter flying over darkened countryside, vanished in an instant. Flights still took place, but there were far fewer of them, and whole squadrons were disbanded as they were declared surplus to requirements. The number of sightings of strange phenomenon also dwindled to zero, although in fact the volume of reports had

already began to decrease by the beginning of April 1945. Most RAF aircrew simply wanted to go home to their families and their former lives, and those who had encountered lights and other unfamiliar items began to forget their experiences. Some former RAF crew members would recount tales of their wartime sightings when the huge waves of UFO reports started to appear in the newspapers during the late 1940s and early 1950s, but most probably took memories of strange lights to their graves without mentioning them to anyone. If British air intelligence staff were taking the phenomenon seriously and had decided to investigate what was going on, they kept this fact very quiet. So quiet, that it is still not known about today, almost eighty years on.

Although numerous, the RAF witness accounts are patchy, and official records rarely back up the post-war recollections of the aircrew that were involved. Contrast this with the American experience, where reporters were able to write stories about sightings by crews, having much more access to operational personnel, and unit records seemed to include a wealth of detail about what was being seen in the skies over Europe. Before reading about the USAAF crews' experiences, it is time to divert our attention away from the actual encounters for a few pages and look at a particular German aircraft that was believed to be behind some UFO sightings, plus a strange case that surfaced in 2010 but which related to events over sixty-five years earlier. This is only a brief diversion, but an interesting one, nonetheless.

Chapter 3:

A Man-Made “Foo-Fighter”? The Horten Ho 229 Flying Wing

Neither of the brothers ever had any contact with any representative of the Soviet Air Force or any other foreign power…

> - Memo, HQ Berlin Command to Deputy Director of Intelligence, Frankfurt, 16th December 1947.

You do not have to go far down the rabbit hole that is the subject of Nazi UFOs to find “links” between the Horten Brothers and the Roswell crash in July 1947. Published in 2011, Annie Jacobsen’s infamous book *Area 51: An Uncensored History of America’s Top Secret Military Base* managed to link the alleged Roswell craft to the Nazis and the Soviets.

Based upon the testimony of an unnamed former engineer who supposedly worked for EG&G, a national defence contractor involved in weapons research since 1948, Jacobsen tells the tale of how the Russians tried to spoof the Americans. According to her informant, Joseph Stalin had concocted a daring plan to make his new Cold War opponents believe that extra-terrestrials had crash-landed in New Mexico. Somehow, the Soviets managed to obtain the services of Josef Mengele, better known as the “Angel of Death” at the Auschwitz concentration camp, and notorious for carrying out so-called medical “experiments” on inmates there. Jacobsen’s source told her that Mengele had surgically altered a group of children to look like small alien beings. At the same time, Soviet engineers were apparently instructed to construct a remote-controlled version of one of the Nazi wartime designs. The bodies of the altered children were placed aboard the craft, and it was flown to New Mexico and purposely crashed for the authorities to find and examine, presumably to cause panic.

Jacobsen suggested that after Roswell, American military intelligence launched a huge manhunt to locate Reimar and Walter Horten, designers of tailless gliders and jet-propelled aircraft during WW2. Somehow, the Horten brothers had not been scooped up by *Paperclip*, the American hunt for scientists and engineers working on super-secret aircraft, missile and electronic equipment in Germany during the war. According to Jacobsen, it was believed that they had assisted the Russians in this endeavour.[401]

These “revelations” come at the end of an otherwise interesting book about the history of Area 51. The idea of a Soviet plot to destabilise America via the discovery of “alien bodies” found in a crashed spacecraft is intriguing but has been thoroughly trashed since it emerged ten years ago.

I have seen photos of pre-war Horten gliders labelled as “Foo Fighters” or Nazi disc-shaped craft designs. Websites selling the German UFO myth try to lump the brothers’ designs into their narrative. What is not known by many is that the Hortens operated on the fringes of the German aircraft industry, fighting for workshop space, materials and testing arrangements. They also used questionable tactics in order to have their designs realised, as tailless aircraft designs were not appreciated in the corridors of power. Political connections were vitally important in Nazi Germany, with projects failing if designers disagreed with VIPs in the *Reich*, especially senior members of the *Reichsluftfahrtminsterium* (RLM, or “German Air Ministry”). It was only when one of their projects met an emergency requirement for a long-range bomber that the RLM took notice of the Horten Brothers.

Until the 2000s, the Hortens were a couple of obscure German aircraft designers, noted in wartime aviation enthusiasts circles for constructing a series of tailless gliders in the 1930s and a radical jet fighter-bomber at the end of the war. They also designed a potential *Amerikabomber*. Adding the Hortens into the Nazi UFO narrative may have largely stemmed from Northrop-Grumman’s approach to the National Geographic TV channel in 2008, in order to fund a documentary that looked into the suspected radar-defeating

properties of one of their wartime flying wing jet fighter-bomber designs. However, there had been rumours that this Horten design, or one very similar, was responsible for UFO sightings since the dawn of the “modern” UFO age in 1947.

The aircraft in question was the Horten H.IX, sometimes referred to as the Ho IX but officially designated Ho 229 by the RLM. Given that RAF bomber crews had reported seeing flying wing and tailless aircraft resembling the Me 163 *Komet* at night during the early months of 1945, could a design built or inspired by the brothers have been responsible for such sightings? A quick history of the H.IX/Ho 229 follows, demonstrating just how difficult it was to have radical aerodynamic ideas accepted by high-ranking German officials in WW2. This can be applied equally to any notions that a flying disc project or “Foo Fighter”-type weapons project was set up in Nazi Germany during the war.

In the early 1980s, Northrop staff visited the National Air & Space Museum’s Paul E. Garber restoration facility in Maryland, carrying out tests to calculate the radar cross-section of a tailless aircraft stored there in a dismantled state. In doing so, their company and this odd-looking machine became reacquainted over thirty years after they had originally crossed paths, shortly after the end of the war. Was it coincidence that at the same time of these tests, Northrop began work on what became the tailless B-2A Spirit stealth bomber, the latter bearing a slight scaled-up resemblance to the aircraft in the NASM, namely the Ho 229 V3 jet-powered “flying wing”?.

By 1942, *Sonderkommando 9*, a secret group set up at Göttingen by the Horten brothers to develop tailless aircraft, was working on the design of their first machine intended specifically for a combat role. It was known as the H.IX in keeping with previous Horten designs, which began with the H.I glider. The third example of the H.IX would eventually find itself under close scrutiny by Northrop personnel halfway across the world. After the war was over, Reimar Horten stated that his flying wing design may have been shielded from the RAF’s Chain Home radar: the 1980s tests and subsequent ones in 2008 proved that the Ho 229 V3’s radar cross-section was

much smaller than conventional aircraft of similar size. In a further twist, the Ho 229's origins also lie within the 1942 equivalent of a "black project", one initially hidden away from parts of the German government.

Reimar and Walter Horten experimented with models of tailless gliders in the late 1920s and early 1930s, building the first full-size sailplane, the H.I, in 1931. Reimar was the designer, and his brother Walter became the "mover and shaker", developing links with the RLM, which allowed them to pursue their passion for radical aeronautics. Walter Horten served as a fighter pilot for a time in JG 26 during the Battle of Britain, as wingman to the famous ace Adolf Galland. The brothers had received a modicum of official backing in 1939 to investigate the effects of high aspect ratio wings, which led to a succession of tailless glider prototypes. Even these early designs have been appropriated by some commentators hell-bent on trying to prove Horten brothers involvement in the UFO subject. I have seen photos of their H.II training glider labelled as "wartime UFOs"!

With a wealth of technical information regarding tailless aircraft to work from, *Sonderkommando* 9 began design work on the H.IX in 1942. The brothers had been inspired by seeing the first test flights of the DFS 194 rocket-powered research aircraft, the forerunner of the Me 163 *Komet*.[402] This little tailless machine achieved 343 mph (550km/h), demonstrating that wooden aircraft could fly as fast as the most modern metal-skinned types. Reimar and Walter elected to keep their project secret to avoid official interference. To reduce weight and drag, plus the minimum use of strategic materials, the aircraft had a welded steel tube centre section, with plywood and wood classed as "waste" in terms of aircraft construction used to cover this and also form the outer wing sections. The wings were to be swept back by 32°, ending in rounded tips, both wing trailing edges curving aft as they neared the centre section in order to form an extremely pointed and pronounced fairing, into which a drag parachute could be fitted.

Even though they had no experience of turbojet technology, the Horten brothers decided to use jet engines in the H.IX, believing that the rocket powered DFS 194 was unsafe. Although construction work began in secret in August 1942, problems with the development of the planned BMW 109-003A-1 turbojets led to delays in the timetable. In addition, access to wind tunnels for research was tightly controlled by the RLM. The Hortens therefore decided that the first H.IX prototype would have to be a glider, one used to collect data that they would have obtained from wind tunnel testing. It was clear that the brothers would have to seek official sanction at some stage for their project, otherwise the project would eventually fail.

Backing for the H.IX was soon acquired. Walter Horten was present at a conference in early 1943 with *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Goering (head of the *Luftwaffe*), RLM officials and representatives from all of the major aircraft manufacturers. Goering was furious with Dornier, Heinkel, Junkers and Messerschmitt, who he believed built similar aircraft with mediocre performance figures. He wanted something quicker than Allied fighters, something capable of carrying a worthwhile payload over a reasonable distance. This quickly transformed into an official RLM requirement for the 1000 x 1000 x 1000 Bomber project in the spring of 1943, the stipulation being that the successful entry for this competition had to carry a 1000kg (2,240lb) bomb load a distance of 1000km (621 miles) at 1000km/h (621 mph). The H.IX seemed to fit these criteria, so the brothers entered their submission, being rewarded in August 1943 with a contract for two prototypes. Much of the construction work on the H.IX V1 had been completed and the V2 was only awaiting engines and the plywood covering for its centre section. The competition ignored the fact that early German turbojets suffered from excessive fuel consumption, making it unlikely that either of the two available jet engines, the BMW 109-003 and Junkers 109-004, could provide the necessary range based on the planned fuel load.

A further problem arose when Generalfeldmarschall Milch, head of the RLM, voiced his dislike of the Horten design and stated it

should not have priority over the Arado Ar 234 *Blitz* and Dornier Do 335 projects. The Horten brothers therefore had to work harder to obtain materials and yet their project still remained on schedule – just. The H.IX V1 made its first flight at Oranienburg on 26th February 1944, just within the window of time the contract allowed for. On 6th March 1944, it was damaged when it skidded off the runway, the pilot retracting the undercarriage to bring it to a halt. More damage was incurred on a subsequent test flight when a flight data recording instrument tube was not retracted on landing.

Delays with deliveries of the BMW turbojet led the Hortens to switch to the more plentiful Junkers 109-004B-1 powerplant, already used in the Me 262 and the Ar 234 *Blitz* bomber. Supplies of this engine were available but the Me 262 had priority. Walter Horten tried to short-circuit the official procurement process by making his own arrangements with the director of jet engine development at Junkers. This informal arrangement, however, led to problems in accurately determining the space needed to install the different jet engines. In March 1944, Reimar Horten obtained a time-expired Junkers 109-004B engine, giving him its correct measurements. To his horror, he found that the diameter of the casing was 18cm wider than that of the BMW engine, due to various items being mounted externally, and a hurried re-design ensued, even though the airframe was around 90% complete. Aircraft abandoned through mechanical faults or lack of fuel at Göttingen were cannibalised for certain parts, including the tailwheel from a Heinkel He 177 *Grief* (“Griffon”) medium bomber and the main undercarriage units from a Bf 109G fighter. Aerodynamically, the H.IX V2 was almost completely different from the V1, rendering the carefully collected and assessed data from the latter’s flight trials useless. Although the Junkers engines were more powerful than the BMW units, their added weight meant lower performance figures than planned.

An air raid in May 1944 nearly terminated the whole project. Everything was therefore moved to the Peschke Flugzeugbau facility at Minden. By autumn 1944, work was progressing at a feverish pace, in an attempt to compensate for the delays caused by engine installation problems and the enforced move, staff often putting in

ninety hour-long weeks. In June 1944, the SS, who were seeking to establish their own air force in competition with the *Luftwaffe*, ordered ten H.IXs from Horten. This was later increased to 20, to be built by Klemm Leichtflugzeugbau located near Stuttgart.

The maiden flight of the H.IX V2 took place at Oranienburg on 18th December 1944. Test pilot Erwin Ziller climbed to an altitude of 1000m (3,280 feet). He then performed a series of manoeuvres and pronounced the aircraft very pleasant to fly. The first test flight of the H.IX V2 was declared a success. Apart from an issue with lateral stability, a problem common to tailless aircraft, there were no major problems to address.

With officials from the RLM and personalities such as Goering favouring the H.IX, it was not surprising that an initial order for 93 production aircraft was made. However, the work was given to Klemm Leichtflugzeugbau (40 airframes) and Gotha Waggonfabrik at Friedrichsroda, Thuringia (53). The H.IX was redesignated as the Ho 229, although many post-war authors incorrectly called it the Go 229. In addition, Gotha would also oversee the construction of six more prototypes, the Ho 229 V3 through V8. Adding to his busy workload, in December 1944 the RLM Technical Director, *Oberst* Siegfried Knemeyer, asked Reimar Horten to design an *Amerikabomber* capable of carrying a 4000kg (8,813lb) bomb load 11000km (6,835 miles) – i.e. to New York and back.[403] This quickly resulted in the H.XVIIIA design being submitted, a huge flying wing powered by six turbojets. Junkers, who had been asked to collaborate in the project, suggested the inclusion of a tailplane to make the design more conventional. This annoyed Reimar, who then came up with a separate proposal, the H.XVIIIB, looking like a scaled-up Ho 229 powered by four BMW engines clustered around two massive undercarriage bays located beneath the centre section.[404] Despite Germany being just five months from defeat, new projects with completely unrealistic chances of success were still seriously entertained, tying up resources which could have been more profitably employed elsewhere.

In January 1945, Ziller participated in a simulated “dogfight” with a Me 262, the V2 attaining speeds close to 804km/h (500 mph). Another flight in co-ordination with a radar station demonstrated that the type had a much lower radar cross-section. Whilst carrying out a high-speed taxying test at Oranienburg on 18th February 1945, the test pilot became briefly airborne and elected to complete a circuit due to the lack of remaining runway for braking. Whilst in the circuit, one of the turbojets suddenly flamed out. This engine controlled the pump that activated the flaps and the undercarriage. Ziller chose to make a landing in a field just short of the runway. The V2 hit the ground and then struck a railway embankment on the edge of the airfield, flipping the machine upside down, killing the unfortunate test pilot and totally wrecking the airframe.[405]

Gotha Waggonfabrik began construction of their six Ho 229 prototypes at Friedrichsroda in February 1945. When the Americans captured the site on 18th April 1945, they discovered the almost-completed V3 prototype, plus four others, two of which were night-fighters. Meanwhile, the Hortens continued to work on their own version of the Ho 229, the H.IXB. It appears that some construction may have taken place on a new prototype, even though the Horten brothers were busy with their *Amerikabomber* project in early 1945.[406] The H.IXB, Ho 229 and *Amerikabomber* designs may have included a mixture of charcoal, glue and rubber called *Schornsteinfeger* (“Chimney Sweep”) in their assembly, this being a special “anti-radar” coating already employed by the U-boat fleet on their *Schnorkel* equipment. We shall return to this substance when dealing with two of the alleged German secret weapons projects that were put forward as possible explanations for the “Foo Fighters”. Reimar apparently wanted Gotha to use plywood impregnated with *Schornsteinfeger* in construction of their Ho 229s or employ the substance as “filler” between layers of wood.

Low radar observability was not totally understood in 1945, as simple jamming or spoofing was considered enough in order to defeat enemy radar systems. However, this has not prevented numerous commentators from stating that Reimar Horten believed

his flying wing's design, together with the use of *Schornsteinfeger*, would improve "radar camouflage", his post-war term for what would be later known as "Stealth". Some have even suggested this is why possible "man-made" UFOs are difficult to track, as they benefited from this technology. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that both the Ho 229 and the H.IXB would have had significantly lower radar cross-sections than conventional aircraft types of comparative size, even without the anti-radar coating. Was this purely by accident or design?

The H.IX V1 was burnt at Brandis in mid-1945 during a clean-up of the airfield, presumably after being examined by personnel from the US Air Intelligence Branch. It is likely that the glider was destroyed to prevent it falling into Russian hands when the Americans finally pulled out of the area in adherence to the February 1945 Yalta agreement, Brandis lying in the Soviet Zone of Occupation. The partly assembled Ho 229 prototypes at Gotha Waggonfabrik's Friedrichsroda facility (apart from the V3) were also reportedly destroyed by US forces prior to their withdrawal from Thuringia in June 1945, though this has never been confirmed. The Horten brothers hid their research and project documentation in a salt mine located at Bad Salzdefurth in Lower Saxony. This stash was eventually found by British personnel in the summer of 1945. Despite overtures to the British and the Americans, the brothers were not included in the brain drain of wartime German scientists and researchers ("Operation Paperclip"), Reimar Horten eventually settling in Argentina where he continued to design gliders.

Aircraft built by the Horten Brothers were certainly in demand by the Occupying Powers. On 21st June 1945, A.I.2(g), the Air Ministry's German aircraft section in Whitehall, London, sent a memo to Brigadier-General George C. McDonald, Director of Intelligence for US Strategic Air Forces in Europe, requesting examples of Horten gliders which had been inspected by Ministry of Aircraft Production teams travelling in the American Zone of Occupation.[407] However, none of these were as advanced as the H.IX. Curiously enough, neither the H.IX nor any other Horten designs were included

in a May 1945 “Category One” list of *Luftwaffe* aircraft required by US Air Technical Intelligence (ATI) for testing and evaluation purposes at Wright Field, Ohio.[408] However, US Air Intelligence had been aware of the H.IX since March 1945, as Combined Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee (CIOS) teams had obtained details of the aircraft whilst interviewing captured German personnel in Bonn at that time.[409] It is likely that they were curious to see if the H.IX could have accounted for some or all of the “balls of fire” or “Foo Fighter” sightings.

The Americans decided to take the V3 prototype centre section to the US for further examination. Allocated the “Foreign Equipment” designation T2-490, it was transported across the Atlantic and eventually arrived at Freeman Army Air Field, Seymour, Indiana. Oddly enough, the Ho 229 V3 is not listed among the deck cargo on HMS *Reaper*, the aircraft carrier on which most captured *Luftwaffe* machines were transported to the USA as deck cargo. Nor does it appear on the manifests of the two Liberty ships which carried the remaining aeronautical material of interest, namely two Me 163Bs, an engineless Me 262A, a Focke-Wulf Ta 154A *Moskito* night-fighter and the prototype Blohm und Voss Bv 155 high-altitude fighter. However, by mid-1946 the V3 was at Freeman Field. Little is known about the airframe at this time, although on 22nd October 1947, Northrop was given permission to move it to their facility located at what is now Chicago O’Hare International Airport. The Ho 229 V3 now resides at the National Air & Space Museum’s Paul E. Garber restoration facility Silver Hill, Maryland, currently stored in a disassembled and deteriorating state.

Efforts to prepare the Ho 229 V3 for flight were apparently terminated in 1946 due to budgetary constraints, but various conspiracy theorists and UFO commentators have suggested that either Northrop or other unknown entities, including the Soviets, built and flew the aircraft themselves, going onto develop their own indigenous versions of the flying wing. According to this “legend”, when test flown, they were then mistaken for flying saucers. Documentation released under the Freedom of Information Act

shows that in December 1947, the Americans were trying to track down the Horten brothers in Germany with the intention of asking them whether any of their designs could have been the source of the UFO sightings sweeping the US.[410] The context of this report gives the impression that intelligence officials believed that these unknown vehicles may have been of Russian manufacture, based on Horten designs. Whilst not wishing to give credence to a particular theory, it is interesting to note that Kenneth Arnold initially described the group of nine objects he saw whilst flying near Mount Rainier, Washington State, on 24th June 1947 as being "heel" shaped. It is also worthwhile pointing out that an artist's impression of one of the objects, endorsed by Arnold, bears a passing resemblance to the Ho 229.

The December 1947 memo is titled *"Horten Brothers (Flying Saucers)".* It states that *"neither of the brothers ever had any contact with any representative of the Soviet Air Force or any other foreign power."* The brothers appeared upset that the Allied powers had ignored their requests to be awarded contracts, either in Germany, Britain or America. However, the memo did concede that a complete set of plans for the H.IX was hidden at the Gotha Waggonfabrik facility. Engineers who had worked for the company during the war had knowledge of this, and it was surmised that they may have offered the plans to the Russians in return for any one of a number of reasons. The final paragraph of the memo shows how the Americans were casting around in all directions for information on flying saucers at that time, and therefore requests regarding the Horten Brothers should be looked at within that context:

"As far as the 'flying saucer' is concerned, a number of people were contacted in order to verify whether or not any such design at any time was contemplated or existed in the files of any German air research institute."

The memo goes onto list Walter Horten and his wife, who had been General Ernst Udet's secretary before his suicide in November 1941,

Guenter Heinrich, a former of the *Reichsluftfahrtminsterium's* technical research section, Professor Betz, former chief of the Aerodynamische Versuchsanstalt (AVA, or "Aerodynamics Institute") at Göttingen who had overseen H.IX wind-tunnel testing in 1944, and Herr Eugen, one of the Horten's former test pilots. They were all questioned about the possibility of flying saucers being based on the Horten Brothers designs:

"All the above mentioned people contacted independently and at different times are very insistent on the fact that to their knowledge and belief no such design ever existed nor was projected by any of the German air research institutions. While they agree such a design would be highly practicable and desirable, they do not know anything about its possible realisation now or in the past."[411]

The H.XVIIIB *Amerikabomber* design has also attracted the subject of attention from post-war revisionists, neo-Nazis and other camp followers, often being linked with the German atomic bomb research programme and the "Foo Fighters". The RLM did award a contract for a single prototype on 12th March 1945, but no work was ever carried out before the end of the war in Europe. However, according to at least one source, construction of an airframe started in two newly-constructed bomb-proof hangars located at a secret underground facility known as *Lachs* ("Salmon"), a former porcelain sand mine located under the Walpersberg, a 311m (1,020 feet) high hill just to the east of Kahla in Thuringia.[412] *Lachs* did exist; it was part of a huge complex called *Flugzeugwerke Hermann Goering* (REIMAHG), construction beginning in April 1944 on this large network of underground tunnels and above-ground bunkers intended for production of Me 262s. Components were built in the tunnels, with final assembly being carried out in the bunkers. Junkers 109-004B-1 engines were assembled in a nearby facility called *Schneehase* ("Mountain Hare").

The entire top of the Walpersberg itself had been levelled to provide a 1000m (3,280 feet) long runway, completed Me 262s being

winched up the hillside on a lift-cum-platform. Although the concrete airstrip was too short for normal departures, rocket-assisted take-off units were fitted to enable the jets to become airborne, their pilots flying to Zerbst to allow final fitting out work to be completed. Some 27 Me 262s were completed and flown out of REIMAHG before the Americans overran the complex on 12th April 1945. Other sources have also placed the H.XVIIIB prototype at another underground site at Ohrdruf, 60km (37 miles) west of Kahla, near Gotha Waggonfabrik's Friedrichsroda plant.[413] The Allies searched these facilities after the war but no records of what was in situ exist, apart from photos of a half-completed Me 262. Presumably the Americans seized or destroyed anything of value before they left Thuringia, which was also located in the Soviet Zone of Occupation.

Lachs is definitely the location of choice for stories of various "exotic" Nazi aircraft and flying discs. It is reputed to be the site where the so-called V-7 jet-powered disc was built and then flew in February 1945. However, details of this project and the test flight have proved so elusive that the V-7 should probably be treated as a revisionist flight of fancy. I will address the thorny subject of this "project" and its origins in the 1950s in Chapter 10 but suffice it to say that the flying disc almost certainly never existed, apart from in the minds of post-war fantasists. Unfortunately, due to the power of the Internet, the myth of the V-7 lives on and occasionally attracts new sets of believers. No doubt if the war had gone on into 1946, REIMAHG or a similar underground site would have been involved in building Ho 229s.

In 2008, Northrop-Grumman approached the National Geographic TV channel to fund a documentary to investigate the alleged radar-defeating properties of the Ho 229's design. They spent around $250,000 in building a full-scale reproduction of the aircraft, faithful to the original as much as possible, even the wartime glue used to bond the plywood sheets together being replicated. Using the company's previously classified radar cross-section testing range at Tejon, California, the reproduction was subjected to electromagnetic pulses similar in amplitude and frequency to those

transmitted by the RAF's wartime Chain Home system. This proved that the Ho 229's radar cross-section was smaller than conventional aircraft of similar size, around 40% of a Bf 109 fighter in the head-on aspect. It was therefore estimated that the flying wing might have taken ten more minutes to be picked up on radar than a similar, "normal" aircraft. At cruising speed, the Ho 229 would have travelled over 80 miles closer to its target in that time, giving intercepting fighters much less of an opportunity to catch it.

It may never be known whether Reimar Horten planned from the outset to build an aircraft with a lower radar signature than its contemporaries, or whether this was just a by-product of its design. What is clear is that the Ho 229 would have had a much smaller radar return than conventional-looking machines of similar size. This was proved by Northrop-Grumman's 2008 tests and possibly by their 1980s trials. It may also have been discovered during the 1940s tests. However, tailless aircraft rarely provide good gun platforms due to inherent lateral instability. The brothers were presumably aware of this fact but still persevered in building a machine with enormous potential in terms of combat and future development. In the night-fighter role, the Ho 229 could have been a handful with its heavy armament and useful endurance, and whilst it might not have lived up to the original RLM specification, the aircraft could have delivered a useful bombload across the Channel with the ability to evade even the fastest of Allied interceptors, confusing and confounding radar operators as it did so. The concept of a "stealth bomber" might well have been beyond Hitler's mental grasp, but if hostilities had ended in late 1945 or early 1946, his *Luftwaffe* could have had whole *Kampfgeschwaderen* of fast, stealthy attack aircraft attacking Britain, all but invisible to radar defences. However, given the protracted nature of its development, the Ho 229 could never have accounted for the number of "Foo Fighter" encounters reported over Occupied Europe.

The H.IX was never a post-war UFO, nor was it the inspiration for a late 1940s Soviet copy of one either, capable of travelling long-distances and ultimately crashing in a remote part of New Mexico so it could be found by the Americans. The story related by Jacobsen

was apparently based on a single person's testimony, one that was never confirmed by anyone else. We will return to the subject of Horten aircraft and UFOs in Chapter 17.

Chapter 4:
A Churchillian Cover-Up?

The aircraft was intercepted by an object of unknown origin…

- Letter from a member of the public, 20th September 1999.

In August 1999, the Ministers Correspondence Unit (MCU) at Whitehall received a five paragraph-long letter from a member of the public. The writer described himself as a *"qualified scientist, specialising in physics and astronomy."* He confirmed that he was engaged in *"developing software for use in spacecraft thermal engineering."* Leicester became the home of the UK's National Space Centre in 2001 and space-related research may well have taken place within the University of Leicester before that time. The letter, dated 14th August 1999, provided only the merest hints of an event that had apparently occurred during WW2, one which involved Winston Churchill and was witnessed by one of his bodyguards. It mentioned a possible incident *"that was immediately classified for up to 50 years".* The author wished to know more about the correct department to contact and offered to assist with any future investigation into the matter.[414]

The letter clearly intrigued the MCU, as they passed it on to the Directorate of Headquarters Security (DHS) in Whitehall, who wrote back to the original writer, asking for more details. A second letter, dated 20th September 1999, complete with two pages of enclosures, was received by the DHS shortly afterwards. The contents seemed to give details of an incident that happened during WW2, one that if true, would have confirmed that Churchill knew of the existence of UFOs long before his now-infamous memo of 1952 was written:

"What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to? What can it mean? What is the truth?"[415]

The letter writer explained that the information he was now providing had come from his mother. The author's grandfather had told her about something which had occurred during WW2, and was now providing these details, *"some of which may already exist in the public domain and some of which has been described to others by my mother."* The event had occurred in a bomb shelter or some other underground facility during WW2.

"It is claimed that my grandfather, [redacted] was present during a debate between Winston Churchill and Mr Eisenhower during World War II involving making a decision about an unexpected incident experienced by a RAF bomber aircrew returning to the UK after a mission into Germany. Mr Churchill is reported to have made a declaration to the effect of the following: 'This event should be immediately classified since it would create mass panic amongst the general population and destroy one's belief in the Church.'"

But what was this mysterious, yet incredibly important event that had occurred during WW2? The letter writer went onto explain further:

"Recently, a television programme was broadcast in the UK, which was seen by my mother, which featured an interview with a former RAF airman who described a similar (or the same) event. I do not know what this programme was called or when it was broadcast, but perhaps the incident has now been de-classified to some extent. My mother has reported that my grandfather was greatly affected by his experience, and although he was not allowed to discuss any of his thoughts about the matter generally, he did divulge some details to my mother when she was very young. To my knowledge, he has not informed anyone else, and due to the nature of the information, there is a danger of any details already made public being disregarded or ridiculed."

What on earth could this event be? There were two pages of enclosures, consisting of his mother's recollections of what his grandfather had told her, and his own personal interest in the matter.

The latter happened to be a professional one too since his interest was *“based on my own personal scientific curiosity.”* He believed that if true, the event required *“a high priority of scientific investigation”*, his interest relating to the development of propulsion techniques that were based on *“quite different principles than those currently employed.”* The letter writer also wanted to be distinguished from those who believed in UFOs and utilised *“crackpot thinking”.* The information given by his mother was quite startling, and when the files were publicly released in August 2010, the details from this correspondence would create a flurry of activity in UFO online chat rooms and elsewhere:

“A report from an RAF aircrew approaching the east coast of England after a mission into Germany sometime in the early 1940s was discussed by leaders in the UK and the US.

The aircraft was intercepted by an object of unknown origin, which matched course and speed with the aircraft for a time and then underwent an extremely rapid acceleration away from the aircraft probably with non-ballistic or non-aerodynamic flight characteristics. Photographs and/or film was obtained by this aircrew showing a metallic arrow-shaped body. This event was discussed by Mr. Churchill and General Eisenhower, neither of whom knew what had been observed. There was a general inability for either side to match a plausible account to these observations, and this caused a high degree of concern.

[Redacted] was not present during the initial discussion when this event was communicated to the US, but he was present at the follow-up meeting when the response from the US was received. He made up his own mind (privately) that no technological capability was known at that time which could account for the observed event. Several years later he felt that this event was of sufficient importance to communicate to another person in a minimum-risk way despite the restrictions imposed by the Official Secrets Act.

The level of detail about this event is small due to its source and the circumstances in which it became known. I have questioned my mother about this and have tried particularly to get an account of the

motion described for this object. I have also tried to eliminate any preconceptions about the nature of these observations that have been deduced by my mother. I do not know the date of the occurrence or the exact location of the bomb shelter where this discussion took place.

Any references that already exist in the public domain about this incident would be greatly appreciated.

[Redacted] remained convinced until his death in 1973 that technological capabilities existed that were not generally known to the public or indeed even to world leaders. He would occasionally hint that our flight technologies were far inferior to the possible limits of development without elaborating on the events that he witnessed during the War." [416]

Instead of completely dismissing these letters out of hand, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) attempted to find out whether there were any closed records on the subject. However, it soon became clear that none could be found. According to an internal loose minute dated 27th September 1999, the MOD took the following view on this "revelation":

"So far as the MOD is concerned, we know of no closed records dating from World War II on this subject."

Elsewhere in this document, the author confirmed Churchill's memo from 1952 asking for a report on "flying saucers" but suggested contact should be made with the Cabinet Office to determine whether the former Prime Minister had ever expressed any earlier interest in UFOs.[417]

Both letters and copies of the internal correspondence were passed to the Ministry of Defence's Secretariat (Air Staff) 2a in Whitehall. This was already known as the "UFO Desk" due to a former member of Sec(AS)2a staff, Nick Pope, subsequently revealing information about his activities whilst working there in the early 1990s. Sec(AS)2a replied to the scientist on 30th September

1999 and their own letter gave the standard MoD response regarding UFO sightings. However, it also gave some advice regarding the existence or otherwise of old UFO files which may have been of help to the scientist:

"Should you wish to pursue your research in this matter, you may wish to view closed MOD files containing reports of 'UFO' sightings. It was generally the case that before 1967 all 'UFO' files were destroyed after five years, as there was insufficient public interest in the subject to merit their permanent retention. Therefore, any 'UFO' report files from the WWII era would most probably have been destroyed."[418]

UK journalists inevitably pored over each latest release of files from the MOD as they were made public, and this particular story made headlines around the world.[419] Had the Prime Minister and the Supreme Commander of Allied Headquarters Europe been privy to knowledge of a "Foo Fighter"? The documents were released by the MOD eleven years after the scientist sent his letter. However, despite the world-wide publicity, to my knowledge, this person has never come forward to give any further details about his grandfather or give interviews.

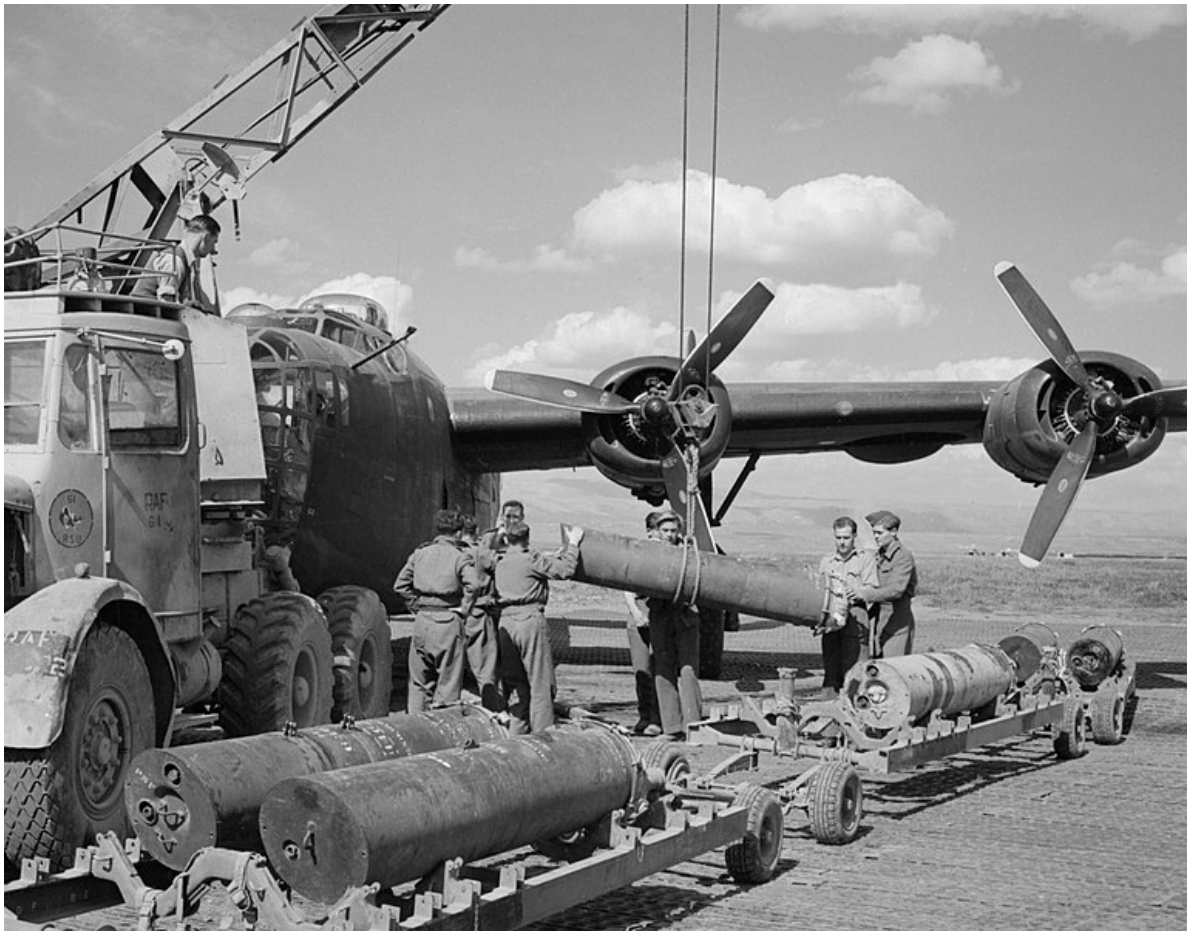
I am not convinced by the details relating to this case. The "evidence" is third-hand, without proof and devoid of the essential details that could have allowed researchers to pin down the actual aircrew or squadron involved. Sec(AS)2a may have been correct in stating that no closed files on the particular case existed, as the event may not have occurred. As we have already discovered that squadrons were patchy in their reporting of events, if researchers were to examine every Mosquito unit ORB in WW2, it is not guaranteed that the details of the incident claimed by the letter writer would be included somewhere. However, mention of strange phenomenon were included in the monthly Operational Research Section and FLO Reports, and it is therefore likely that the details of this particular case, if it actually happened at all, would have

appeared in these files long before Churchill got wind of it. They do not include this information. In addition, by the time Eisenhower was meeting with the Prime Minister, there had been several similar encounters involving RAF bombers, at least one with the mystery object being shot at. Yet there is no suggestion that these cases were ever covered up in the same fashion. Some authors have taken Churchill's involvement here as fact and yet that is not necessarily the case.

Unless subsequent releases of previously-secret files tell us otherwise, the scientist did not follow up his initial requests for information with further letters or queries, and as far as the MoD were concerned, the matter was concluded. The case therefore remains a complete mystery, one which may never be solved due to the absence of more data.

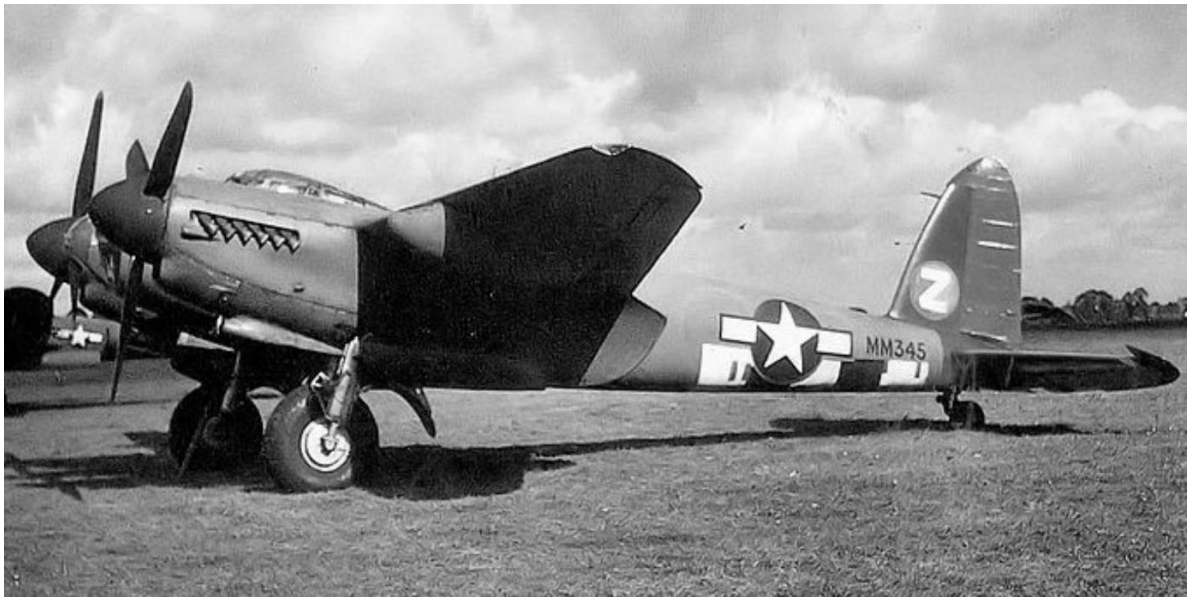
Vickers Wellington Mk.III X3662/KD-P belonged to No.115 Sqdn. It is very similar to the Mk.IV bomber flown by the Polish crew of No.301 Sqdn which encountered a mysterious luminous disc that approached their aircraft over Germany in March 1942. The tail and nose gunners in the aircraft opened fire at the strange object, but to no avail. (HMSO Copyright expired)

Avro Lancaster MK.II DS604/QR-W was from No.61 Sqdn, the same unit that W/O Lever served with. Lever and the rest of his crew saw a huge, unknown object on two separate occasions during the same raid over northern Italy in November 1942. (HMSO Copyright expired)

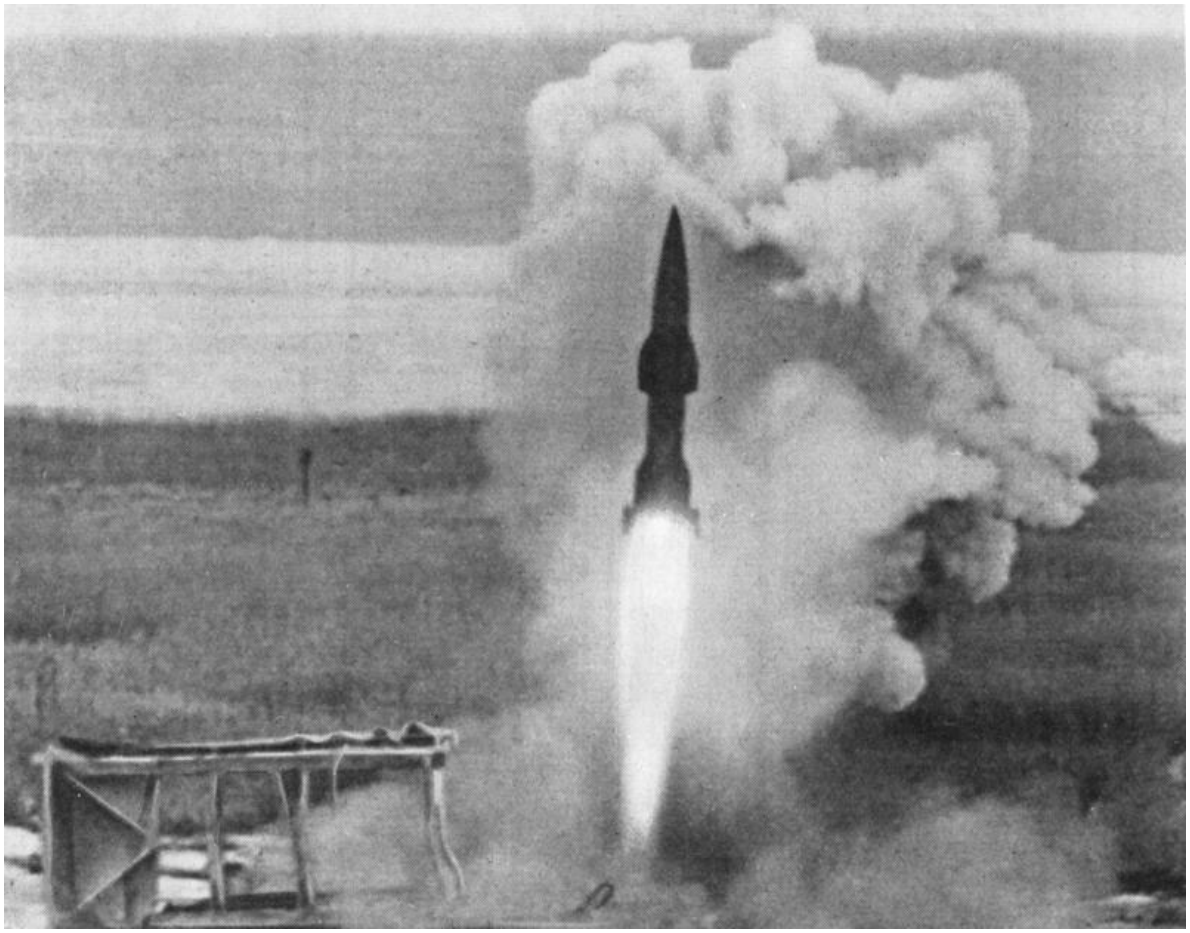


A Liberator bomber belonging to No.178 Sqdn, RAF, is loaded with mines for a minelaying mission along the River Danube in Hungary in the summer of 1944. The B-24D was used by several RAF squadrons based in Italy, No.178 Sqdn crews frequently reporting “rockets” over the Balkans during 1944, together with large numbers of unidentified “aircraft” with bright lights in their noses. (HMSO Copyright expired)

Bristol Beaufighter Mk.VIF KV912 belonged to the 416th Night-Fighter Squadron, US Army Air Force, based in Italy during late 1943. Crews flying these aircraft encountered strange lights during missions over northern Italy in 1944. Many sightings were reported along the Po Valley and in the La Spezia area. (USAAF).



Mosquito MM345 belonged to the 654th Bomb Squadron, 25th Bomb Group, used in the weather reconnaissance role. Similar aircraft from the 653rd, a sister unit, were involved in strange encounters that occurred in January and March 1945. (National Archives, via AFHRA)



The EMW *Wasserfall* (“Waterfall”) resembled a smaller version of the V-2. Trials were unsuccessful, just thirty-five being launched from Peenemünde before the entire programme was halted in February 1945. *Flak* rockets such as this could never have performed manoeuvres as reported by some RAF and USAAF personnel in WW2. (Creative Commons)

(Below) Me 262B-1a/U1 jet night-fighter *w/n* 110635 “Red 10” is pictured at Schleswig airfield near the Danish border in May 1945, shortly after the end of hostilities. This was one of the two-seat Me 262 trainers converted into temporary night-fighters by Deutsche Lufthansa at their Berlin-Staaken workshops in early 1945. It was late March 1945 before any of these saw operational service. (Gordon Permann archive)

The same aircraft is seen here wearing RAF markings after being captured at the end of the war. Notice the huge *Hirschgeweih* (“Stag Antlers”) aerials for the radar operator’s FuG 218 *Neptun* set. Such machines could never have performed the kinds of manoeuvres displayed by the “Foo Fighters”.

A retouched photograph of Arado Ar 234B-2 *Blitz w/n* 140112 “T9+GH”, which served with *Versuchsverband OKL* at Rheine, near Osnabrück, from 22nd September 1944. It flew daylight reconnaissance missions over Allied territory in France, and photographic sorties over England, taking images of ports along the South Coast, around Kent, the Thames Estuary, Harwich and East Anglia. However, it was not operated at night, so could not have sparked off a rash of “Foo Fighter” reports. (HMSO Copyright expired)

Messerschmitt Me 163A V4 *Komet* “KE+SW” is pictured at Peenemünde-West during early flight trials. One particular flight in October 1941 involved the aircraft being towed to altitude. After casting off and igniting the Walter rocket motor, the test pilot, Heini Dittmar, reached 623 mph (1000 km/h), a new world speed record at that time. However, this could not be advertised due to security reasons. Even so, Dittmar actually managed to nudge the sound barrier during this record-breaking flight. However, such machines could not have been responsible for the “Foo Fighter” sightings later in the war as they did not fly at night. (Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1972-058-62)

Me 163B V8 “VD+ER” was the eighth prototype of the B-series *Komet* rocket-powered interceptor, the combat-capable variant. It first flew with a Walter liquid-fuelled rocket motor installed in February 1943. The aircraft’s wheeled dolly, jettisoned immediately after take-off, plus the extendable skid used during landings, are clearly visible in this photograph. Over 350 *Komets* were built but they were extremely dangerous, both on the ground and in the air. Although never flown at night, reports of encounters with the type were recorded by RAF bomber and USAAF night-fighter crews in late 1944 and early 1945 over Germany and Italy. (HMSO Copyright expired)

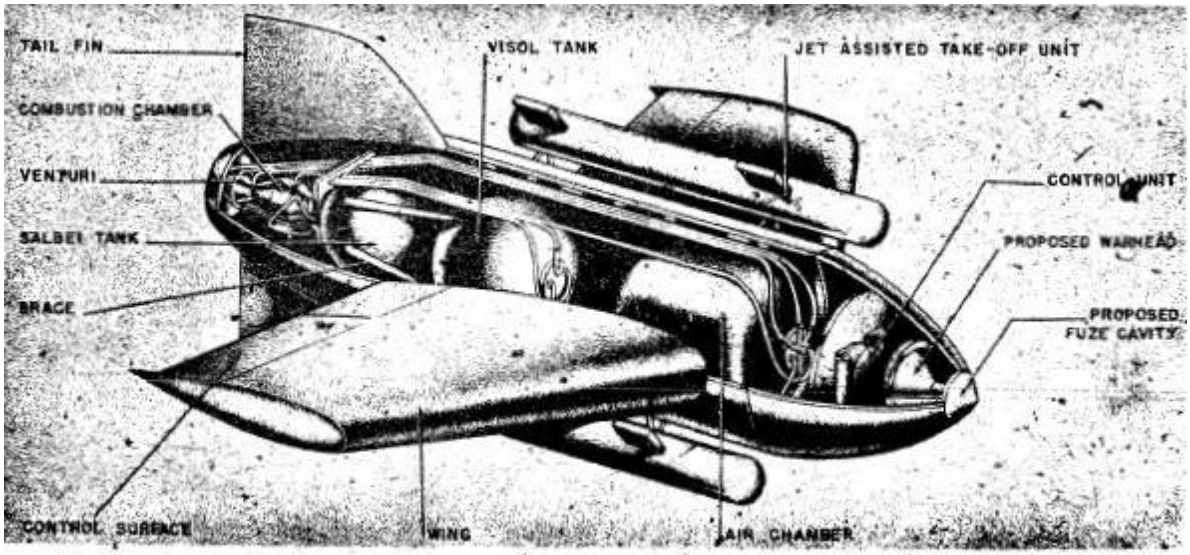
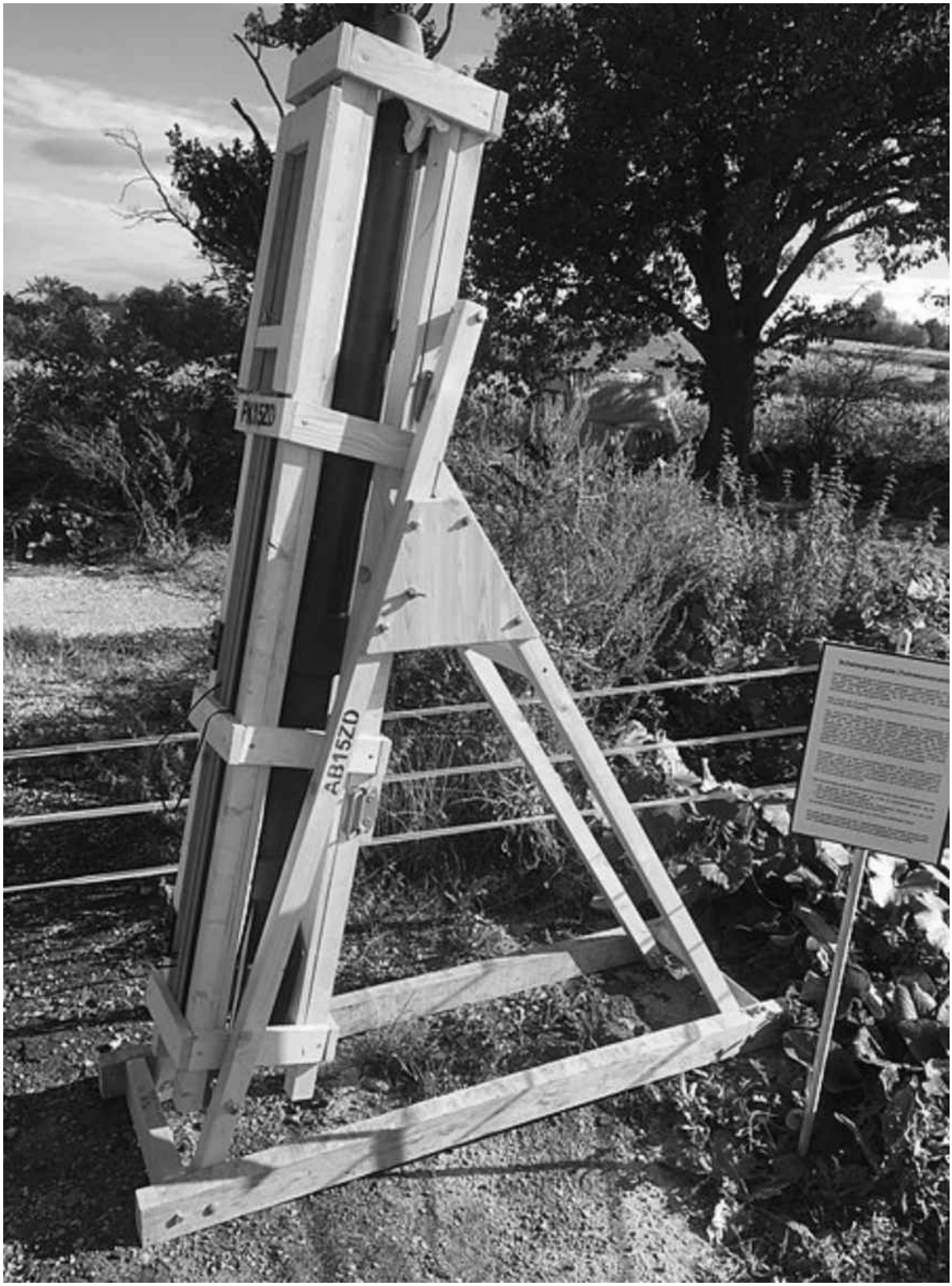


Figure 202—Enzian E-4

The Messerschmitt Enzian was an early surface-to-air missile launched by four solid-fuelled boosters and powered to its target by a liquid-fuelled sustainer motor. Designed in 1943, firing trials started in the summer of 1944, but the project was cancelled in January 1945. Whilst it looked like a smaller version of the Me 163 *Komet*, neither this nor any of the German jets or missiles could have been “Foo Fighters”. (USAAF image)


AB15ZD

A *Scheinsignalrakete* sitting in its wooden launching cradle. A ground-to-air version of the standard 15cm *Nebelwerfer* rocket artillery mortar round, this device was used to launch decoy flares. Its maximum altitude was between 6,000 and 8,000 feet, much lower than the mysterious rockets reported by RAF B-24 Liberator aircrews over the Balkans in the spring and summer of 1944. (Niederberger01, via Creative Commons licence)

A blurry image of a *Rheintochter* surface-to-air missile on a test flight during 1944. Some eighty-two test firings took place between August 1943 and February 1945. Three different versions were built, this being the initial R.I variant, featuring two separate stages, each fitted with a solid-fuelled rocket. The lower stage (pictured below the

central “fins”) was jettisoned soon after launch. Early *flak* missiles like this could never have matched the performance demonstrated by the “Foo Fighters”. *Rheintochter* was never put into service. (Anagoria, München Deutsches Museum)

Heinkel He 162A-2 *Volksjäger w/n* 120222 (“White 23”) from I./JG 1 was captured at Leck airfield in May 1945. Although the only single-engined jet aircraft type to see operational service with the *Luftwaffe*, machines with similar characteristics were being reported by Allied aircrew at night, several months prior to the first production *Volksjäger* becoming available for operational evaluation trials in January 1945. (SDASM Archive)

One of numerous photographs allegedly portraying “Foo Fighters” in the vicinity of formations of B-17 Flying Fortresses flying over Germany during WW2. It is likely that these small white balls were *flak* shells bursting some distance from the bomber formation, although it is possible they were added in at some stage with photo manipulation software. Some of the more famous “Foo Fighter” photographs may well have been film defects. None of the photographs that claim to show these types of objects can be proven as such. However, according to witness testimony, several images were taken during an encounter that took place over the Bay of Biscay in November 1942. These have never been released publicly,

and if they do still exist, will be buried away in a hidden file somewhere.

Note: Most images which purport to show “Foo Fighters” were taken in the Pacific Theatre of Operations and feature either Imperial Japanese Army Air Force or Naval Air Force machines. However, they are often incorrectly labelled as being *Luftwaffe* or Allied aircraft. Readers are therefore advised to treat all photos claiming to depict “Foo Fighters” with extreme caution. None of these images appear to have any attributable provenance.

The Horten H.IX (Ho 229) V3 prototype lies disassembled at the National Air & Space Museum's Paul E. Garber restoration facility located at Silver Hill, Maryland. Hostilities ended before it could be completed. Transported to the US for evaluation, it was never flown. T2-490 is the identification number assigned by the Foreign Technology Division at Wright Field. The swastika is spurious. (Creative Commons, via Michael Katzmann)

Consolidated B-24D Liberator bombers over Europe, 1943. Similar aircraft were operated by the 361st Bombardment Squadron from Cornwall in late 1942. One of their crews encountered a huge object that trailed their B-24 during a mission over the Bay of Biscay in November of that year. Photos were apparently taken but have never surfaced. (NARA, in Public Domain)

Chapter 5:

Enter the Americans: Daylight Raids, Flying Fish, Pinwheels and Hockey Pucks

A ball-like object; looked silvery and was stationary at 30,000'.

- 384th Bomb Group mission report, 8th February 1944.

As already mentioned, it has been long reported in UFO publications and elsewhere that American pilots first began to see strange lights and objects in the skies over Europe at the end of November 1944. However, eyewitness accounts and official records dictate otherwise, and in the case of a unit that had recently arrived in south-west England, one of their crews would experience a sighting over the Bay of Biscay a full two years before the "Foo Fighter" phrase was created.

1942

The Civilian Research, Interplanetary Flying Objects (CRIFO) newsletter had been set up in 1954 by noted researcher Leonard Stringfield. Although it did not last as long as some early UFO publications, it still attracted contributions from around the world. In CRIFO Vol. I No. 10 dated January 1955, Stringfield listed the details from a letter he had received in May 1954 from a witness that was referred to only as "C. J. J." This former USAAF air gunner had requested total anonymity regarding his sighting in November 1942 as the letter was described as being "name restricted".

"C. J. J. was attached to the --- Wing of an anti-submarine squadron whose unit was assigned to duty in the Bay of Biscay. According to C. J. J., the tail gunner first sighted the UFO, a strange craft 'without wings'. Others, including the Ass't Engineer, confirmed the object

and the 'intercom became a jumbled mess of incoherent squawks', as the spotters gave the pilot a detailed account. During this time, C. J. J. was in the ball turret, and by the time he ascended to the waist deck, most of the crew was watching the 'thing'. T/Sgt. F. M. B., with a K-20 camera, was already shooting pictures. By this time, the UFO was flying behind us at 5 o'clock. Although it was difficult to determine its distance, the object, which appeared 'massive', soon gained altitude without visible means of propulsion. In view for about 15 minutes, the object finally executed a 180 degree angle turn and disappeared. Out of a number of exposures taken by the Sgt., only one, with filter, showed details. This 'perfect print' became a matter of US and RAF Intelligence."[420]

US anti-submarine operations over the Bay of Biscay in November 1942 were conducted from RAF St. Eval in Cornwall, England. They were performed by the USAAF, not the US Navy, as these tasks would not be transferred to the latter until the summer of 1943. In the meantime, the Americans were attached to RAF Coastal Command and started learning about how to fly patrol missions over the Bay of Biscay and the Western Approaches, both busy transit and hunting grounds for the U-boat fleet based in Brittany. The 361st Bombardment Squadron (part of the 304th Bombardment Group) arrived at St. Eval from America on 10th November 1942, so the above incident must have occurred during the first few weeks of operations. The unit was not flying at full strength during this period and would not reach its full complement of sixteen aircraft for several weeks. The 361st, which flew the four-engined Consolidated B-24D Liberator bomber in the maritime patrol role, was re-designated as the 1st Antisubmarine Sqdn on 23rd November. It was easy enough to find the name of the Technical Sergeant who took the photos of the strange object, as he was killed a few months later whilst on operations with a different crew, their aircraft probably being shot down by a *Luftwaffe* Ju 88. I have not published his name here in respect of the original letter writer's wishes as set out in CRIFO. I have been unable to determine the latter's name.

The official records of the 361st BS/1st A/S Sqdn do not appear to include any mention of this incident, although C. J. J. claimed that after returning to St. Eval, he and his crew were interrogated about the object. It is likely that the photos taken by T/Sgt. F. M. B. were included with a report sent to Air Intelligence, but neither the report nor the pictures have ever referred to elsewhere, never mind being released in the public domain. The incident itself is only mentioned in a couple of books and websites yet appears to be the first involving an American aircrew in the European Theatre of Operations during WW2 and so deserves more attention.[421] It does, however, seem strange that the witness left his post in the ball turret to see the object. One would have thought an encounter with a strange flying vehicle would have kept the gunners in their turrets.

I have tried on numerous occasions to obtain the relevant 1st A/S Sqdn/361st BS records under many search headings, as the unit changed its name around the time of the alleged sighting, but to no avail. It does not appear that the original 1955 reporting of the encounter was followed up by researchers at the time, or since, which is a shame, as this is an interesting incident that deserves much more coverage than it received in 1955.

1943

Keith Chester's 2007 book *Strange Company* includes an account of projectiles which were described as "schools of flying fish", with anything up to around one hundred of them being seen at any one time. According to Chester, who had taken the details from *Consolidated Flak Liaison Report No.139*, the incident occurred on 15th January 1943 *"during a US raid over Cherbourg, France."* The strange objects had also apparently been witnessed by a British *flak* liaison officer who had flown on the raid. He apparently suggested that they might have been some sort of *flak* rocket but urged caution in labelling them until further information was obtained.[422] The report was very interesting, suggesting that more than just one crew reported this strange phenomenon:

"Several reports were received of large numbers of projectiles (estimated between 50 and 100 at a time) resembling "shoals of flying fish", about a foot long and similar to incendiary bombs, coming up from the direction of the town. These might possibly have been some kind of rockets, but this suggestion must be treated with reserve pending further confirmation."[423]

February 1943 saw a new phenomenon which was called "Parachute flak" by American air intelligence staff. It had only been reported sporadically, specifically over Brest, Dunkirk and Wilhelmshaven, but the Eighth Air Force was not travelling too far from English shores at that time. It was believed that parachutes with cables or explosive charges dangling from them could pose a risk to bomber formations. A photograph was taken but due to a poor exposure, nothing was shown.[424] Clearly the American crews were seeing strange things in the skies and were interpreting them the best that they could under new, stressful and challenging conditions. It would not be the last time this phenomenon was reported in official documents.

Strange Company was on more certain ground when it told the story of the so-called "Roman Candle" lights witnessed over Naples on 13th March 1943. The Ninth Air Force sent out a fleet of B-24 Liberators from bases in North Africa to attack the city's harbour, although some aircraft did not bomb the target due to heavy overcast. Among the units involved was the 376th Bombardment Group, originally earmarked for the Pacific Theatre but retained in the Mediterranean, initially for attacks against Rommel's Afrika Korps and then targets in Italy and Romania. An American Periodic Intelligence Summary for March 1943 states that the first "Roman Candle" witnessed by the 376th BG actually *"came up from the sea and glowed in the sky for a few seconds."* The second sighting took place at 17,000 feet as the unit's bombers were heading away from the target. What was described as *"a bright very large light"* was noted at the same altitude they were flying at and apparently

remained stationary throughout the encounter. In the words of a crew member, *"it looked like a huge irregular mass of neon, and was a steady light, not a reflection."*[425] The report did not mention whether the second light had also climbed up to their altitude from the water, plus how it was lost to sight or disappeared. It is possible that the one that briefly came up from the water was a flare fired from a German *Vorpostenboot* (*flak* ship) moored in or just outside the harbour itself but explaining the second is much more difficult due to its altitude.

Discussion of airborne rocket launchers fitted to *Luftwaffe* aircraft was included in the US Eighth Air Force's *Weekly Air Intelligence Digest* for the week ending 29th May 1943. A brief note was included regarding possible "long-barrelled cannons" that, when fired, produced muzzle flashes twelve feet long. Observers reported that aircraft carrying such weapons were able to stand off at some distance from the American bomber "boxes", around 1,000 yards in most cases:

"These reports have been studied by the Ordinance Officers of VIII Bomber Command, who conclude that this weapon 'is most likely to be a rocket launcher roughly of the 4-inch size.' The VIII Bomber Command A-2 report points out that from interrogation of crew members who have seen these enemy aircraft, and have been fired upon by them, it does not appear that any of our aircraft have been damaged by these new weapons."[426]

Rocket shells were certainly a reality, as they would be employed against the US daylight bomber formations as early as July 1943[427], but they were not responsible for the RAF sightings over the Balkans in 1944 due to them not being employed at night. These weapons were also presumably not the cause of strange aerial objects noted by American aircrews in May 1943. The first entry on an Eighth Air Force list marked "Secret" and entitled *"Data on Unusual Objects & Missiles Encountered on Missions"* gave brief details about an unusual set of devices noted on a raid to St. Nazaire on 29th May

1943. At least one crew belonging to the 1st Bomb Wing had reported seeing “red balloons” rising towards the formation of bombers. When they eventually exploded, they went off with a red flash.[428] Strange “red balls” were also noted that month on a raid to Kiel, although it was believed these had simply been the after-effects of an unusual *flak* burst. Whatever these balls were, they climbed away from the burst and headed towards a much higher altitude before disappearing themselves.[429]

Strange “balloon” shaped objects also were noted at the end of August 1943 over Germany, and at altitudes way in excess of normal operations for the *Luftwaffe’s Sperrballons* (“barrage balloons”). B-17 crews belonging to the US Eighth Air Force’s 4th Bomber Wing saw a number of *“small, white balloons, each six to eight feet in diameter”* during the 31st August raid between 24,000 and 28,000 feet. These were therefore a lot smaller than the standard *Sperrballonen* used by the *Luftwaffe.* Other incidents included mid-air “firecracker” type explosions witnessed by 4 BW personnel and more air-to-air rockets.[430] In the Le Mans area on 4th July 1943, the Germans must have entered into the spirit of the American Independence Day celebrations as bomber crews noticed *“three brown objects, similar to skyrockets”* at 21,000 feet near the target. Unfortunately, neither the unit involved, nor any crew names were provided.[431]

What were these mysterious rockets? Such projectiles were certainly being witnessed in the last week of July 1943. American bomber crews on daylight raids over Germany had reported what were described as *“rocket-propelled bombs”* being fired from *Luftwaffe* fighter aircraft, in addition to baseball-sized rocket projectiles and other strange contraptions. Such weapons were noted during raids on Hanover, Kassel, and Oschersleben, one of them being believed to have been launched from a “belly gun”. A pair of projectiles was tracked visually as they left a blue-grey smoke trail across the sky. It is possible that these were early deployments of the *Werfer-Granate 21* (Wfr.Gr. 21) air-to-air development of the standard 21 cm *Nebelwerfer 42* rocket artillery shell. Examples of the latter had been captured in North Africa and pictures of one

projectile, almost certainly the surface-launched version, were published in the US Eighth Air Force's *Weekly Air Intelligence Digest* of August 1943.[432] However, there were also reports of stovepipe-shaped objects falling into the middle of bomber formations. These were probably fuel tanks being jettisoned, or perhaps one of the early attempts to "bomb" the American B-17s combat "boxes".[433]

July 1943 also saw yet another new phenomenon added to the Eighth Air Force's lexicon. The Flak Liaison Officer attached to No.1 Group, RAF Bomber Command had already highlighted "incandescent ring bursts" on night-time raids over Germany earlier that month, and it was not long before the Americans encountered something similar. "Pinwheels" were reported by crews from the 102nd Provisional Combat Bomber Wing on a mission to Kassel on 28th July 1943. They were described as black rings from which a series of "streamers" emanated and did not dissipate whilst in view. Although believed to result from *flak* bursts, these six or seven-foot diameter objects seemed to suddenly appear at 26,300 feet without an explosion. It was noted that the British counterpart was being called the "Catherine Wheel" after the popular firework. Whatever this was, it merited a full page description in the 1st BW's July Flak Report.[434]

A further report written in July 1943 was sent from Major E. R. T. Holmes, the Flak Liaison Officer attached to the 1st Bombardment Wing, to M.I.14(e) at Whitehall in London, the department concerned with all forms of intelligence about Germany. Holmes informed M.I.14(e) about the new rocket mortars being used against the American daylight raids, these being Wfr.Gr. 21s, but also mentioned one of the current night "phenomena:

"These rockets may also be used at night, as 'meteor-like' objects are often reported by the RAF while on night bombing operations."[435]

However, Major Holmes had more mysteries to share. There were reports of objects *"fluttering down like leaves"*, in varying sizes

although as much as six feet long had been mentioned by some crews. Whatever they were, the items were described as *"looking like aluminium."* Added to the tales of "balloons" and other devices, it appeared that the Germans were inventing some weird defensive measures to use against the USAAF.

If "Roman Candles" and strange balloons were viewed as odd, then the scores of "tiny silver disks" that were encountered by American bomber crews on a mission to Stuttgart at the beginning of September 1943 were just plain weird – and if the stories were to be believed, apparently deadly. These objects have become part of the "Foo Fighter" legend too, given that descriptions of the incident appeared in several UFO books over the years. According to post-mission reports of the raid on the 6th of that month, *"objects resembling silver discs about the size of half-dollars were observed in air over target area."* [436] However, this was not contained in the formal report forwarded up the chain of command by the Intelligence staff of the 384th BG at Grafton Underwood, but it does appear in a second report for the attention of the Office of Air Intelligence A-2 Duty Desk Section A sent the next day. A follow-up report titled *"Additional Information on the Observation of Silvery Colored Discs on Mission to Stuttgart, 6 Sept 1943"* was composed and sent to the 1st BW. It included sightings of the small disks that were made by two of the 384th BG's crews over the target area. The disks comprised what was described as *"a mass of material"* which kept its shape as it descended at a slow rate of speed through the formation. *Luftwaffe* Fw 190s were seen above the B-17s but they were not witnessed dropping the discs. Some of the objects struck the wing of a 384th BG B-17F and it immediately started to burn. According to the witnesses, this aircraft did not return from the mission.[437]

Five of the 384th's B-17s failed to return from Stuttgart. One ran out of fuel and crashed near Metz and two more were damaged by fighters and crashed near Beauvais. A fourth was hit by enemy fighters and *flak* and force-landed in France. The only official mention of wing damage concerns B-17F 42-3455 *Lucky Strike*, flown by 1/Lt. R. \Faulkiner. The starboard wing of his Flying Fortress

was hit by *flak*, causing a fuel leak. A *Luftwaffe* Fw 190 “finished them off” and the aircraft crashed near Reims.[438] There are no reports of silver discs in any of the loss reports for the bombers.

Such an unorthodox weapon was destined to make the pages of the *Weekly Air Intelligence Digest*, and sure enough an account of the attack appeared a few weeks later. Over half a page was devoted to the discs reported during the Stuttgart raid, and according to this article, entitled *“’Silver’ Air Incendiaries On Two Fronts”*, something not too dissimilar had been seen over Messina back in July 1943. I have taken the liberty of reproducing the entire piece in full here, as it is a fascinating look at an incredibly odd set of tactics, and something which apparently had already been used, possibly to no great effect, at least two months earlier.

“Additional information has been received concerning silver-colored discs, about the size of half dollars, which were dropped on B-17s in the attack on Stuttgart, 6 September. The observation was made in the target area by two Fortress crews; this was the only place these objects were noted. At the time from two to four Fw 190s and one Ju 88 were flying from 2,000 to 3,000 feet above and a little ahead of the B-17 formation. These enemy aircraft were not seen to drop the material, but it came from somewhere above. As to its shape, it was a mass of material, kept a good pattern, did not dissipate as it streamed down, and fell comparatively slowly. In one instance, the cluster appeared to be about eight feet long and four feet wide as it streamed downward. Another observation stated it was about 75 feet long and 20 feet wide, these dimensions in length being the size from top to bottom as it fell. The cluster was composed of small round objects, silvery in color. In all instances the objects fell in the path of the aircraft. Some were observed to fall on the wing of a B-17; the wing immediately started to burn, and this aircraft did not return from the mission.

In this connection, a report from the Mediterranean on what is described as ‘confetti flak’ is of interest. IX Bomber Command reports it is a new type of AA fire which looked ‘like irregular-shaped

tinfoil sheets'. It was observed over Messina on 14 July. (…) Another report said 'Our ship flew through one batch of queer flak or silver looking paper. It looked like irregular-shaped tinfoil sheets, very light in weight, floating down and not connected together in any way. I do not know whether it was from above or shot up from the ground.'"[439]

The aircraft with the burning wing was possibly the 384th BG machine referred to above. Another crew witnessed a cloud of large white objects pass over their aircraft, the pilot of which reporting that he thought they had been dumped by two other bombers ahead of him.[440]

The discs may well have been part of a more elaborate German plan to attack the bombers. According to mission reports, the *Luftwaffe* appeared to be using some rather unorthodox tactics during this raid. The crew of 2nd Lt William Price's B-17F 42-30043 *Ruthless* watched a Messerschmitt Me 210 *Zerstörer* ("Destroyer") releasing what was described as a "parachute air mine" over the formation, with the mine itself measuring one foot in diameter. If indeed this was an aerial mine, it did not explode, and no damage was sustained by any of the bombers. Lt Price also reported Focke-Wulf Fw 190A fighters carrying "rocket guns" under each wing. These would have almost certainly been Wfr.Gr. 21 rocket mortars, standard 210mm Nebelwerfer rocket artillery shells that were adapted for air launching, as described in the chapter dealing with RAF incidents. The Germans had introduced these into service during the summer of 1943, although the weapon had to be mounted at a slight angle underneath the aircraft's wings, which made aiming and firing awkward. Accuracy suffered as a result, and the post-mission report for the Stuttgart raid mentions that the "rockets" veered off course to the right soon after they were launched. A second Me 210 dropped a three feet long cylindrical object into the middle of the 384th BG's formation whilst the American gunners were engaging other enemy aircraft.[441] The twin-engined Me 210s could also carry mortars, and their pilots could jettison the launching tubes after the rockets were fired in order to prevent drag and

improve performance. It is therefore likely that the three foot long cylindrical object noted in the post-mission report was one of these. Another report mentioned *flak* bursts resembling yellow, red and white “artificial snow”, these being witnessed by two separate B-17 crews. Clearly none of these were “Foo Fighters”, but it is important to explain what was probably going on above Stuttgart since the incident keeps cropping up in connection with them.

It should be noted that some of the details listed by the squadron intelligence officers in their reports were somewhat dubious. According to the after-mission report for the 6th September 1943 raid on Stuttgart, a Messerschmitt Bf 109G single-seat fighter was noted with *“a 37mm gun in the tail.”* Tail-mounted guns were not fitted to single-engined fighters such as the Bf 109 and this observation was absurd, presumably a mistake made in the heat of battle or a comment that was misinterpreted. In any case, a 37mm gun equated to the early PAK 36 anti-tank weapons used by the Germans and there was simply no space to fit one of these in the tail of a Bf 109G, and even if there had been, the aircraft’s centre of gravity would have been severely compromised. There was also a report of the formation being *“attacked by a Spitfire with British markings”* over Germany, which would not have been an RAF operated machine as the type simply did not have the range to reach Stuttgart and return, even with extra fuel tanks. It is possible that this was one of the *Zirkus Rosarius* machines which had somehow been included into the mix as yet another distraction.

Nevertheless, a report regarding the silver discs ended up on General Henry H. Arnold’s desk on 13th September 1943. “Hap” Arnold was the Commanding General of the USAAF, and so details of the phenomenon had gone to the very top. The report was found among his collection of papers after they were passed to the Air Force Historical Records Center at Maxwell AFB. Arnold immediately requested answers about the “disc” phenomenon. Experts from the Air and Technical Intelligence branches, plus specialists from the chemical weapons division were consulted but could not provide any definitive information to solve the mystery.

In the late summer and early autumn of 1943, the Eighth Air Force carried out two separate attacks on the Kugellagerwerke ball-bearing factory at Schweinfurt in Bavaria. The first was conducted on 17th August and was a joint raid on the plant and nearby Regensburg, where a Messerschmitt assembly plant and an oil refinery were located. A second raid against Schweinfurt was finally carried out on 14th October 1943 and 291 B-17s were sent to Bavaria. “Mission #115”, as it was officially known, was the subject of *Black Thursday*, written by Martin Caidin and published in 1960. In the book, the author included a couple of paragraphs about an unusual incident that occurred shortly after the B-17s from the 384th BG had passed the Initial Point (the calculated position where their bomb run began from) and were approaching the target. Caidin stated that he had interviewed numerous crewmembers, and they had all said the same thing. The defending *Luftwaffe* fighters broke off their attacks and when the bombers passed the IP, they were alone without interference from the enemy. According to Caidin’s book, that was soon about to change.

“At the moment the pilots and top turret gunners, as well as several crewmen in the plexiglass noses of the bombers, reported a cluster of discs in the path of the 384th’s formation and closing with the bombers. The startled exclamations focussed attention on the phenomenon, and the crews talked back and forth, discussing, and confirming the astonishing sight before them.”

Caidin described the discs, presumably based on his interviews with the crews themselves. They were silver-coloured, about an inch thick and three inches in diameter, so about the same size as an ice hockey puck. Although clearly these were tiny objects, according to the author, *“they were easily seen by the B-17 crewmen, gliding down slowly in a very uniform cluster.”*[442] Caidin stated that “B-17 Number 026” closed rapidly with one cluster, its pilot attempting in vain to avoid the discs in his path. According to the pilot, the aircraft’s starboard wing simply *“went directly through a cluster with*

absolutely no effect on engines or plane surface." Keith Chester's *Strange Company* gave more details about the crew of that particular B-17. Major G. W. Harris and his co-pilot, Captain P. M. Algar, both observed the "silver-coloured discs" and also heard some of them striking their aircraft's tail fin. They also reported seeing a *"mass of black debris of varying sizes"* about twenty feet or so from the discs themselves. Neither of the two men could identify the source of the objects. In addition, the pilot of the B-17 flying behind Harris and Algar also witnessed the discs. 1st Lt Edmund Goulder told intelligence officers that the *Luftwaffe* fighters *"were dropping pie plates on them."* His B-17 was apparently *"shot up pretty badly, but they were able to make it back to England before bailing out."*[443]

Caidin cited a report which included "FLO" (Flak Liaison Officer) in its subject reference. As it would have been still classified as "secret" and presumably unobtainable in 1960, one wonders how the author managed to get hold of a copy. Researcher Andy Roberts carried out some excellent detective work in the 1990s in order to work out whether or not the author's story was true. His findings are available at the Project 1947 website and are a fascinating read. After some research I was also able to confirm the identities of the aircraft involved in both Caidin's and Chester's books

Harris and Algar were in B-17F Flying Fortress 42-30026, coded "BK-J", and named *Battlewagon.* It belonged to the 546th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy), one of three squadrons that comprised the 384th BG based at Station #106 at Grafton Underwood in Northamptonshire.[444] *Battlewagon* had been with the 546th for four months and would fly 33 missions with the unit. George Harris was indeed the pilot, and Philip Algar his co-pilot. Behind them in the formation, 1st Lt Goulder was flying one of the 547th BS machines, B-17F 42-5852 *The Natural*, co-piloted by Ernest Boyce.[445] As Chester stated, Goulder's Flying Fortress had been severely damaged, but the aircraft held together long enough for them to reach England, where the crew bailed out before it crashed. The two crews must have been flying in the same combat "box". Each box was usually made up of aircraft from the same

squadron, but the two Fortresses belonged to different units, albeit under the command of the same Bombardment Group and based at the same airfield. However, this could have been down to confusion during the "assembly" phase of the mission, when aircraft circled after take-off, awaiting their colleagues before forming up into their "boxes" for the flight over enemy-occupied territory, or a temporary swap of crews and machines between units. I managed to obtain a copy of the relevant FLO Report mentioning these discs. It references a previous report which covered the incident, providing more details about the Schweinfurt sighting:

"Aircraft flew directly through clusters with absolutely no effect on engines, plane surfaces, or tail assembly although discs could be heard striking. There is no evidence of the source of the discs but 'masses of black discs varying in size from 3 to 4 feet' were seen about 20 ft distant from the clusters."[446]

An annex to another intelligence report for the same mission, which was dated 17th October 1943, provided even more detail, stating the following:

"A cluster of disks was observed in the path of the formation near Schweinfurt, at the time there were no E/A above. Discs were described as silver colored – one inch thick and three inches in diameter. They were gliding slowly down in very uniform cluster. A/C 026 was unable to avoid them, and his right wing went directly through a cluster with absolutely no effect on engines or plane surfaces. One of the discs was heard striking tail assembly but no explosion was observed. About 20 foot from those discs a mass of black debris of varying sizes in clusters of 3 by 4 foot. Also observed 2 other A/C flying through silver discs with no apparent damage. Observed discs and debris 2 other times but could not determine where it came from."[447]

It is interesting to note that another two B-17s from the same “combat box” flew through the clusters without damage resulting. Whatever these things were, they did not seem to explode on impact with or in close proximity to the bombers. If it was a new enemy weapon, it was not very effective.

Clearly Martin Caidin had not been trying to tell a tall tale when he included the account of the silver discs in *Black Thursday.* It was not the only publication where a report of this encounter was included. It was also listed by Frank Edwards in his 1967 book *Flying Saucers: Here and Now!* He included what boiled down to a very similar account of the Schweinfurt incident, although the names of the crews and their units were omitted. Edwards also gave details of a report submitted by the Flak Liaison Officer (FLO) from the “1st Bombardment Squadron” to the Minister of Information at the War Office in London. The report included details of the Schweinfurt sighting. This, according to Edwards, was Major E. R. T. Holmes, who we have already come across.[448]

Holmes was not too difficult to track down. A pre-war captain of Surrey Cricket Club who played Test matches in the West Indies in 1934-35, Errol Holmes was a major in the Royal Artillery in WW2 and was also regarded as something of an expert on German *flak* weapons. As the first FLO attached to the Eighth Air Force, he even flew as an observer onboard one of 58 bombers sent against Wilhelmshaven on 27th January 1943, the first American raid against a target in Germany. Quoting from Holmes’ report, Edwards had everything right apart from which unit the FLO concerned was attached to. It was actually the 1st Bombardment Wing, which had been based in England since July 1942. Each of the FLOs attached to the first three Eighth Air Force Bombardment Wings were British officers as the Americans had yet to train their own men.

Major Holmes would undoubtedly have seen all of the reports relating to silver discs that were submitted from the various squadrons and groups under the command of 1st Bombardment Wing, and it is very likely that information from the other Wings was made available to him as well. The report listed above and quoted in

Flying Saucers: Here and Now!, can also be found among the Air Intelligence files, and validates the Schweinfurt incident that Edwards and Caidin included in their books. Although other researchers have included the names of the officers that the report was intended for, they do not appear to have explained who they were. Colonel Kingman Douglas is the first name listed. This was Kingman Douglass, senior USAAF intelligence liaison officer attached to the British Air Ministry and later the Allied Intelligence Group in the Pacific Theatre of Operations. Douglass, together with senior intelligence officers from the RAF, Air Ministry and other USAAF air commands, formed the "Jockey Committee" in June 1943 to co-ordinate British and American bombing efforts against the Germans. "Jockey" looked at information relating to potential new targets, especially in the enemy's aircraft industry. What is more interesting about Douglass is that he became the Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Group (the forerunner of the CIA) in March 1946 and was with the organisation for around a year. After the CIA itself was established, he became its Deputy Director in 1950, serving until June 1952.

Second on the list of recipients the report was intended for circulation to, was a Wing Commander Smith of "Air Intelligence 3". AI3 dealt with details relating to the *Luftwaffe* and was divided into a number of sub-sections. AI3(b) dealt with the *Luftwaffe's* order of battle, or in other words, which aircraft were serving with which units. AI3(c) handled information related to the German aviation industry and attacks on factories building aircraft, and AI3(d) handled intelligence dealing with *Luftwaffe* airfields and infrastructure in Germany and occupied countries. An offshoot was also set up to liaise with the Americans, designated AI3 (USA), and headed up by Colonel Douglas. AI3 (USA) had officers placed in departments located throughout the Air Ministry.

Smith was clearly part of AI3, but his full name, position and role are unknown. A contender could be Hugh Smith, Reader in Anglo-Saxon at University College, London, and a colleague of Dr R. V. Jones in Air Intelligence who, despite only being a Flight Lieutenant, was given the honorary title of Wing Commander when he went into

France after D-Day to examine captured radar equipment.[449] More details are however known about the last name on the list, Wing Commander Heath, who again was working in AI3. This may well have been Sqn Ldr (later Wg Cdr) Walter Heath, who was involved in photographic interpretation during the early years of the war, establishing AI1(h), a small interpretation "cell" in the Air Ministry. A "Wg Cdr Heath" crops up again with relation to UFOs in the immediate post-war period, as in July 1946 he was one of two intelligence officers sent to liaise with their counterparts in the Swedish Government during the spate of "ghost rocket" sightings in Scandinavia. Back in WW2, the report regarding the Schweinfurt mission listed Heath as being part of "Air Intelligence 2". AI2 dealt with *Luftwaffe* equipment, handling details of the aircraft themselves, including their aerodynamics, crew facilities and radar equipment. A sub-section known as AI2(g) at RAF Stanmore in Middlesex apparently had a "museum" of German equipment for trainee air intelligence officers to become familiar with. As enemy secret weapons were no doubt believed to be the source of the sightings of strange aerial phenomenon, it seems obvious that staff from AI2 and AI3 would have received details of these aircrew reports.

Michael Swords' *UFOs and Government: A Historical Enquiry*, published in 2012, gives Wg Cdr Barrie Heath as the name of the officer dispatched to Sweden.[450] He had flown with No.611 Sqdn in the Battle of Britain and later commanded No.64 Sqdn before becoming Wing Leader of No.244 Wing in Italy. The only time Heath appeared to be "flying a desk" was between September and December 1941 when he served as Wing Commander, Tactics, at the Headquarters of Fighter Command. In December 1941 he was posted to the Middle East and did not return home until after the war. It is therefore questionable that he would have been in a position to receive these Air Intelligence reports as a member of AI2.

The concept of dropping bombs on enemy bomber formations may well have been considered by the Germans prior to the autumn of 1943. An early mention of this possible tactic appeared in the US Eighth Air Force's *Weekly Air Intelligence Digest Vol.2 No.13* at the

end of March 1943. A short report of “assorted tactical tricks” observed on behalf of German fighter pilots during the American daylight raid on Wilhelmshaven on 22nd March included a strange incident noted by several B-24 Liberator crews.

“After leaving the target, two Me 110s flying parallel and approximately 500 feet above the formation dropped two small parachutes with unidentified objects suspended. No explosions were observed. Two groups of B-17s report that six Ju 88s dropped bombs from approximately 5,000 feet above the formation as it was en route to base over the North Sea.”[451]

Further reports of objects being dropped onto bomber formations by the Germans were lodged by crews of B-17 Flying Fortresses participating on the raid on Comiso aerodrome in Sicily on 26th May 1943. The witnesses noted single-seater Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters making climbing turns over their group before releasing *“aerial bombs which burst behind the formation.”* The bursts were reported as being accurate in terms of correct altitude. On the previous day, during a raid crossing the Sicilian coast at 7,000 feet, a formation of B-17s had been attacked by at least 50 fighters, one of which released a “stick” that exploded at the same level as the bombers, causing *“a large black explosion, larger than a flak burst”.* Other crews reported seeing air bursts from bombs that fell from above. Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighters had seemingly employed the same tactics on the 21st. Intelligence analysts suspected that some sort of radio-operated proximity fuse may have been used to explode the bombs at the same height the American bombers were flying at. [452]

At least one B-17 was believed to have been downed by an “air-to-air bomb” over Sicily in July 1943. According to Weekly Air Intelligence Digest Vol.3 No.2, *“over Catania, Sicily, on 4 July, B-17s of Northwest African Air Forces were attacked aggressively for 20 minutes by at least 50 to 75 German and Italian fighters, which dived in single lines from above and released clusters of incendiary aerial bombs. One B-17 was knocked down and 12 were damaged.”* The

report went onto mention a B-24 that was apparently destroyed by the same tactic.[453] Whilst these were not “Foo Fighters” by any means, it is useful to understand that strange items were already being witnessed in the skies over Europe, and even stranger things would be reported before the end of the war.

If the report of the Me 210 dropping a “parachute air mine” onto the 384th BG formation during the Stuttgart raid on 6th September 1943 referred to an actual event and not simply someone seeing things in the “fog of war”, then the *Luftwaffe* was clearly experimenting with such tactics. There are anecdotal accounts of pilots seeing bombs suspended from cables but again these may have been simply local modifications by individual units which were not put into wide-scale production. By that stage of the war, the Germans were fighting a slow but ultimately losing battle against the aerial armadas pummelling their cities and factories both by day and night. Desperation was beginning to set in and ideas that may have once been discarded were now being seriously examined in case they showed any merit.

Mention of a small silver disc that ignited on contact with a bomber’s wing would possibly seem to indicate some sort of thermite device, or better still, a thermate weapon, which might deliver a higher temperature over a more concentrated area. A device that was alleged to have been capable of being steered into bomber formations, and then which would detonate by means of a proximity fuse, is the subject of another chapter. It is part of the claims made by an Italian author about objects that were mistaken for “Foo Fighters” during WW2. Whilst I suspect these discs were in fact shrapnel from some new type of German bomb designed to explode within Allied bomber formations, the true nature of the little black “hockey pucks” witnessed by crews from the 384th BG ultimately still remains a mystery in the absence of actual evidence and testimony from *Luftwaffe* personnel flying that day.

A sighting of a slightly different nature, but possibly connected with these efforts to “bomb” American bombers, was that of a “white balloon” noted just above a combat formation west of Naples on 30th

May 1943. One of the Fifteenth Air Force crews reported seeing a long cable, perhaps fifty to seventy-five feet in length, dangling from it. They were certain that an enemy Bf 110 twin-engined fighter, which had just screamed past their group at about 200 yards range, had released the “balloon”. Comments that the Germans were attaching grenades to piano wire and dangling such arrangements from balloons were included.[454] It is possible that this (and other wartime sightings of strange “balloons”) may well have been a new method of attacking American daylight bomber formations, although ultimately another unsuccessful one.

The *Luftwaffe* did however test the concept of dropping bombs on enemy bomber formations at the end of 1944. After only a few days as the commanding officer of its new jet night-fighter unit, *Major* Gerhard Stamp went on to set up a new Me 262 *Kommando* bearing his name on 27th December 1944. This time its role was evaluating the possibility of attacking American day bombers with AB 500 or SC 250 bombs fitted to the racks installed on the Me 262A-2a fighter-bomber version. If the unit’s War Diary is to be believed, *Kommando Stamp* indicates that a few “kills” were obtained with the AB 500 bomb, but nothing with the smaller SC 250s. Just one AB 500 could be carried by a Me 262. The unit was equipped with just six aircraft, all of which were fitted with special gunsights to allow pilots to release the bombs relatively accurately.[455]

“Pie plates” were also reported falling on bomber formations during the summer of 1943. Brief accounts of the presumed enemy deployment of such projectiles appeared in another Weekly Air Intelligence bulletin, and it seemed as though they were dropped by the canister-load before a small explosive charge burst the cover open to allow these devices to fall away. A number of B-17s sent out to bomb Capua aerodrome on 26th August were attacked by these “pie plates”, causing small amounts of damage to two or three aircraft.[456] “Silver” also seemed to be a common theme at that time. The FLO report that covered November 1943 included details of more strange objects noticed in the skies over Germany by American bomber crews.

"During operations carried out on 5 November 1943, over northern France, many crews report having seen several bursts which were described as 'concentrations of light silvery flakes, believed phosphorus', 'bursts seen to scatter silvery particles', and 'several unusual bursts of silvery flakes or sheets'. It has been suggested that these were leaflets which were being dropped at the same time, but this may have been only coincidence. (…) Several bursts which appeared to spin on exploding were also seen."[457]

It is likely that these "flakes" were some sort of shrapnel, with sunlight reflecting off their surfaces. However, the spinning reference was something else entirely, and matched other reports of "Catherine Wheels" that were being recorded at around the same time.

Some readers may have found it frustrating that I have concentrated on what may be regarded by some as simply obscure *Luftwaffe* weapons over the last few pages, but these silver discs have featured in several UFO books and numerous websites in connection with the "Foo Fighters", so it is only fair that they are examined in depth. Whilst they did not necessarily resemble the mysterious lights that were seen by both RAF and USAAF aircrew, they were certainly an unknown device of some description. Nearly eighty years on, there is still no definite explanation for what these objects were, and they do not appear in any of the reference works regarding *Luftwaffe* bombs, rockets and other weaponry. At the time, and in the absence of further details, they were considered just as much a possible threat by bomber crews as the "Foo Fighters" would prove to be regarded twelve months later. It would not be the last time that the silver disc phenomenon was encountered.

The RAF No.115 Sqdn's newsletter *Bang On!* Included an interesting snippet that related to an American daylight raid in December 1943:

"On the 11th December, the Yanks paid one of their daylight visits to Emden. Visibility was good and the weather clear. An unidentified object was seen in the target area. It was about the size of a [Republic P-47] Thunderbolt and passed 50/75 yards beneath the formation. It flew STRAIGHT and LEVEL. (No chaps it was not a Lanc gone mad…) at a terrific speed, leaving a streak like a vapour trail which was all white and which remained visible for a long time. The object passed so quickly that the observer could not determine it more accurately. Suggestions will be welcome… serious ones… as to what this Loch Ness Monster of Emden might have been."[458]

Details of the same object, together with a description of a long white vapour trail, also appeared in Consolidated FLO Report No.191. Reports of "silver and red discs" also featured, witnessed on a mission to Bremen on 13th December 1943.[459] On this occasion, however, these objects did not appear to fall onto the aircraft, and instead were seen directly above the formation of American bombers. If this was not enough for the stressed-out aircrew to contend with, "rockets", suspected of being fired from the ground, were also noted and were described as leaving black spirals of smoke in their wakes.[460]

The mysterious object emitting a long white vapour trail has featured in many books and websites dealing with the "Foo Fighters", but little in the way of research has been done to try and explain what it was. I believe I might have a possible answer. Whilst not quite the size of a P-47 Thunderbolt, flight trials of the *Luftwaffe's* Me 163 *Komet* rocket-powered interceptor were underway in December 1943. *Erprobungskommando 16* (EKdo 16), commanded by Major Wolfgang Späte, had been set up at Peenemünde-West (Karlshagen) at the end of 1942 as a trials unit in order to evaluate the combat potential of the type. Following the RAF bombing raid on the V-2 rocket development facilities there in August 1943, Ekdo 16 moved westwards to Bad Zwischenahn, near Oldenburg in the far north-west of Germany.[461] It had received its first test examples of the Me 163A variant the previous month, although these were not

armed and would eventually be replaced by the B-series combat-capable version. The latter were not delivered to EKdo 16 until January 1944. One of the distinctive features of the *Komet* was its long, white rocket exhaust plume. Given Emden's close proximity to Bad Zwischenahn, it is likely that the aircraft leaving a long white vapour trail, as reported in *Bang On!*, was one of the testing unit's Me 163As. As for the report of the object passing within 50 to 75 yards of the bombers, the Me 163 was around two-thirds the size of a P-47 Thunderbolt and therefore if the latter was being used as a yardstick, it is likely that the *Komet*, if indeed this was one, was even closer than suggested. However, it seems strange that the pilot of a test aircraft would put his life and his machine in danger by flying so close to a large amount of defensive weaponry. The distance may well have been exaggerated by crew members who were surprised to see such a vehicle flying.

In the early 1990s, former 390th Bombardment Group crew member Louis Kiss, who had been a S/Sgt. in one of the unit's B-17 Flying Fortresses, informed the Citizens Against UFO Secrecy (CAUS) about his own wartime sighting. Kiss, who was a tail gunner onboard a B-17 known as *Phyllis Marie*, had witnessed an odd-looking object whilst over central Germany on a raid during late 1943 (the exact date and target unknown). S/Sgt. Kiss watched as a "shimmery gold" sphere, about the size of a basketball, approached his aircraft from below and behind. It sailed past his tail compartment and took up station directly above one of the wings, then moved over to the opposite wing. Whilst above the wings, it seemed to hover, maintaining the exact same speed as the B-17. According to the report, Kiss thought about opening fire with his machine-guns, but decided not to as the sphere was dangerously close to the aircraft's fuel tanks.[462]

The tail gunner watched the object fall back towards the rear of the bomber. It then seemed to become caught up in the aircraft's prop-wash and then rapidly disappeared into the "combat box" of B-17s flying behind him. Kiss reported the incident to an intelligence officer after returning to base but never found out whether anyone

else in his unit saw the mysterious sphere.[463] *Phyllis Marie* was badly damaged on a mission to Berlin on 8th March 1944, and the pilot elected to force-land the aircraft in Denmark as one of his waist gunners was too badly injured to bail out. Kiss was not part of the bomber's crew at that time. The B-17 was recovered and repaired by the *Luftwaffe*, ending up in the *Zirkus Rosarius* for testing purposes and later as part of the KG200 fleet of captured enemy aircraft. It was used for clandestine supply and reconnaissance flights before being recaptured by American forces at Altenburg airfield on 4th May 1945.

One of the things that Kiss mentioned in his account jarred slightly with me when I read it for the first time, so I decided to check what facts existed about this case. *Phyllis Marie* was the name given to B-17F 42-30713, which belonged to the 568th BS, one of the four squadrons comprising the 390th BG based at RAF Framlingham in Suffolk. Louis Kiss was indeed the aircraft's tail gunner, as there is photographic evidence to confirm this. A photo exists of him seated in his gun position, and the words *"A Kiss in the Ass"* can be seen painted on the extreme tip of the fuselage.[464] I have not been able to work out which mission the gunner saw the mystery object, but this is not the problem I have. He mentioned not wanting to open fire when the sphere was above the B-17's wings, as it was dangerously close to the aircraft's fuel tanks. Two things spring to mind here. It would have been impossible for a tail gunner to shoot at an object hovering over the wings, as his guns simply could not be turned to face directly sideways or forwards. There was simply no way of bringing them to bear from the tail position. Kiss would have had a limited view of something maintaining station over the bomber's wings, as his position had a number of side windows which allowed a partial view forward. However, in order to engage anything flying over the wings, he would have had to leave the tail gun compartment and move forward to the waist gunners' stations in the mid-point of the rear fuselage. Short of an inflight-emergency, it would have been a dereliction of duty for a tail gunner to abandon his post whilst over enemy territory in this manner. Although I do not entirely doubt the

story given to CAUS by Louis Kiss, it would appear that at least one element may be exaggerated or incorrect.

The year almost rounded out with a strange report of *"ground fired rockets"* that were observed by crews from the 2nd Bomb Division as they flew towards Solingen on 1st December 1943. The rockets left a bright red coloured flame and a smoke trail behind them as they flew upwards, before groups of *"small orange balls shot out, forming umbrellas of smoke."* Twelve days later, on a raid to Bremen, crews from the 1st Air Division saw more ground-launched rockets, this time emitting pink bursts at around 27,000 feet. This was too high for the *Scheinsignalrakete*, a German solid-fuelled rocket designed to fire flares that simulated Allied target markers. This device has already discussed when reporting on the RAF raids over the Balkans in 1944. Such devices were only ever employed up to around 6,000 to 8,000 feet. In addition, the Kiel raid on the same day saw further rocket projectiles apparently coming up from the ground to some 25,000 feet, where crews of the 2nd Air Division witnessed them again leaving smoke trails and then bursting with a "cascade effect." [465]

The 2nd Bombardment Division's Monthly Flak Report for December 1943 made interesting reading for those trying to make sense of the multitude of reports connected with "phenomena". Apart from the now-common reference to "rockets, Major H. F. King, their FLO, had included entries regarding "umbrellas of smoke". However, what was certainly new were sightings of "cotton wool balls" which had been seen floating around in the sky. No-one had any explanation as to what these may have been. Another unknown quantity that was seen at the same time, but possibly the same phenomenon given their description, were groups of white "bursts" which were noticed appearing several thousand feet above the bomber formations.[466] They were also reported by other elements of the Eighth Air Force but did not seem to present any particular damage to the American bombers.[467] Yet again, there was no explanation given.

A worrying development was reported during an attack on Cognac in France on 5th December 1943. According to one of the crews that took part in the raid, a rocket projectile was fired from the ground at the bomber formation as it flew over the St. Brieuc area. It reached the same level that the B-17s were flying at (18,000 feet) before arching over their "combat boxes", leaving a smoke trail behind it. Whatever this object was, it finally disappeared by bursting into what was described as a "three pronged effect of smoke".[468] Further "projectiles" apparently rose skywards from the ground during a raid on Kiel eight days later, reaching 26,000 feet.[469]

1943 ended with another strange phenomenon, and not one from the usual bomber or night-fighter sources. A report involving several 85th BS crews was included as part of a *"New Flak Phenomenon"* report issued by the Mediterranean Air Force at the end of December 1943. At that time, the unit flew the Douglas A-20 medium bomber, which also went under the nickname "Boston" as that was the name assigned to the type by the RAF when they started operating examples of the type in 1941. In December 1943 the 85th was based at Vincenzo, one of the airfields in the Foggia complex in eastern Italy. On the 16th of that month, the squadron put up three flights of 12 A-20s for a raid against enemy positions in the S. Elia area, near Viterbo. During the mission, numerous aircrew members, later estimated at over twenty, from six separate aircraft, reported seeing what was described as an unusual "cloud of white smoke". Seeing a ball of smoke was not too strange as this would have been the after-effect of a *flak* burst, but this would have dissipated rapidly. This was not the case in the December 1943 incident, as the witnesses were then subjected to a further "special interrogation" at 0800 hours the following day. What was so odd about this particular "ball of smoke"? The report took up the story:

"On 16 December, a box of six planes [from the 85th BS] flew with the 84th Bombardment Squadron as the second box in that flight, which consisted of three flights of 12 A-20s scheduled over an area target, one part of which was adjacent to the town of San Elia. Time

on Target was 14.41 hours. Interrogation of crews this mission yielded the following information. It seemed that the explosion occurred at approximately 10,000', at the altitude of the formation, immediately preceding the bomb run and 800-900 yards behind the formation. The explosion appeared as a red flash, immediately followed by a momentary puff of black smoke, which immediately was replaced by a white smokish [sic] pattern, variously reported as being from the size of a jeep to the size of a [unreadable]. *The smoke seemed to hang in its original position for a long period of time, not moving or seen to dissipate when it was finally lost to view in the haze prevalent that day. A streamer or similar to a phosphorus streak hung from the main body of white smoke, perpendicular to the ground and beginning at the bottom-most part of the main body, extending downwards perhaps 25 feet. There were neither friendly nor enemy aircraft in the vicinity with the exception of close fighter cover. The formation* [of A-20s] *was opposed only by flak of light calibre. All personnel questioned have surprisingly similar descriptions of this unique phenomena."*

The interrogating officer was inclined to believe the reports of this strange ball of smoke.[470] Crews from the 84th BS were asked to provide more details and confirm they had witnessed the same thing. Some described it as about the size of a fighter aircraft, one which formed an *"oval pattern with a 'tail' extending downwards with streamers"*. One of the gunners, who was actually flying with a crew from the 97th BS in another formation some distance behind, reported that the object was still suspended in mid-air when they reached the same spot a few minutes later.

The early morning interrogation on the 17th elicited more detail on the encounter. The "ball of smoke" was first noticed by two pilots from the lead "Vic" (three aircraft in a "V"-shaped formation) of the 85th BS "box". It apparently drifted back into view of the air gunners who had a rearward view, having temporarily disappeared. This could of course have been due to slight variations in the overall haze. The crews described it as being of a size that two A-20s could

have been placed within, one on top of the other. Although most personnel believed it was “full-blown” in size when it first appeared, one gunner thought it was still growing whilst he was watching it. The phenomena was claimed to remain in sight *“as long as the human eye permitted, not dissipating nor any movement being detected.”* The last observation made was from a “great distance”. Finally, no shock wave was felt by any of the crews when the initial flash occurred, nor were any concussive effects experienced across the formation of A-20s.[471]

The escorts for the medium bombers on this raid were sixteen Spitfire Mk.IXs drawn from the 31st FS and the RAF’s No.111 Sqdn. Some of their pilots also reported seeing the odd-looking smoke ball with streamers. Checking the RAF records, I found more details. The inclusion of such an event was strange, as fighter squadrons rarely listed much information beyond the basics. Ten RAF Spitfires were involved, and it is therefore likely that all of their pilots witnessed the strange “ball of smoke”. The No.111 Sqdn ORB contained the following information:

“One burst of flak, white, giving out long streamers, and hanging in the air for a long time seen over target. This burst was extremely accurate for height and deflection. May have been ‘marker flak’ as no other type was seen.”[472]

Whilst on the face of it, this “ball” appeared to be the aftermath of a large *flak* burst, its ability to explode without the usual shockwave and then stay in position for a long period of time was something new. It was never actually established what kind of weapon or object this long-lasting “smoke ball” actually was. Similar sightings would be made the following year over Germany, but the crews coined a different name for the phenomenon.

It was funny how attitudes among intelligence staff had changed within the course of just twelve months. A further memo released about the same time explained the current situation:

“Reports were greeted with scepticism if not derision at first. It is likely that any valuable reports were lost by the crew members’ reluctance to report such strange things they knew they had seen. They often had little general knowledge of ordnance and usually their observations were only fleeting glimpses caught in the heat of battle. ‘Pink flak’ became a joke long before it was a well understood phenomenon. To compound the difficulty, interrogating officers were new to their business and no better acquainted with the galaxy of ordnance devices than the crews. At first they even had no personal estimate of the relative reliability of individual crew members. And finally, all crew interrogation was performed against an arbitrarily set time limit.”[473]

Although this was an American report, the statement could have equally been applied to the RAF intelligence officers who took statements from bomber crews in 1942 and 1943. The fear of ridicule and disbelief ensured that many reports of encounters with odd objects and strange lights remained unreported, and certainly never went anywhere near official records even if they were given to debriefing officers when crews returned from raids. And yet some reports from these years still made it through these barriers. But things were changing, as the report made very clear.

1944

Plans to invade northern France in the summer of 1944 were already well under way by the beginning of the year, although the exact date and place were still under discussion. One thing that was certain in the minds of the planners, perhaps bolstered by reports of strange “rockets” and other items in the skies over Occupied Europe, was that the Germans would attempt to throw any invading force back into the sea, using the much-rumoured V-weapons to help do so.

On 6th January 1944, the Americans set up the Committee on Counter-Measures Against German Secret Weapons, part of their part in the larger Allied “Crossbow” operations against V-weapons

production and testing facilities. Among the members of the committee's scientific and technical group was Doctor Howard P. Robertson. He would become a member of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) and the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC), in addition to his roles as Chief of the Scientific Intelligence Advisory Section within Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF). In 1953 Robertson would lead a CIA panel bearing his name that determined whether UFOs posed a national security risk to the United States.

The CIA panel was well into Robertson's future, though. By the end of January 1944, he had become a consultant to General Carl A. Spaatz, commander of the newly-formed United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe (USSTAF), his duties including the formulation of possible counter-measures to the rumoured V-2 rocket. It is therefore likely that the reports of other types of "rockets" being seen by Allied aircrew were therefore seen by Robertson. He travelled between to England from Washington DC at least once that month and may also have had access to RAF reports of similar phenomenon.

Keith Chester's book *Strange Company* mentions that 22 B-17 bombers from the 384th Bomb Group took part in a raid on Halberstadt on 11th January 1943. One of the crews, led by G. W. Stiers, observed what was described as *"a smoke ball floating and swirling in the air of burning particles"*, whilst his tail gunner said it looked like *"a big swarm of bees milling around."* This description of a "swarm of bees" would persist in further sightings during the following few months, although it was strangely familiar given the incident reported over Italy in December 1943. According to footnotes in Chester's book, the report originated from briefing notes and an interrogation form from the 384th BG dated 11th January 1943. The reports would have been written up on the same day of the raid, after the crews had returned to base. However, the unit did not begin operations until 22nd June 1943, when it bombed a vehicle factory in Antwerp, Belgium. Brand-new B-17Fs from the four squadrons of the 384th did not arrive in England until May 1943 and spent the next few weeks "working up" to become operational. The initial 20 crews that were assigned to the Group in March 1943 does

not include anyone by the name of Stiers, and no-one by that name was serving with the Group.

In reality, Halberstadt was the target of the 384th BG on 11th January 1944, so the year was listed incorrectly in *Strange Company*, as was the pilot's name. 1/Lt. George Withers Stier is listed as the captain of B-17G Flying Fortress 42-37776/BK-R *Lady Drew*, and he was flying on only his fourth operational mission after arriving in England.[474] George Stier was assigned to the 546th Bombardment Squadron, one of four that comprised the 384th BG at Grafton Underwood. He had aborted two other missions, one due to oxygen failure onboard his B-17 and the other when he was unable to locate the rest of his squadron after climbing through cloud shortly after take-off. The tail gunner listed in the report was therefore Sgt. Melvin Mock. Stier's aircraft was damaged by *flak* on 16th March 1944 over France whilst returning from Oberpfaffenhofen and crashed in France. He was taken prisoner and survived the war. Mock had been assigned to a different crew by then and completed his tour of ops, returning to the States in September 1944.

The official sortie report states that the Group bombed the secondary target of Veltenhof instead of Halberstadt, due to bad weather. This also forced Steir to land at Seething airfield in Norfolk on his return, instead of his home base.[475] There is nothing in the report about the strange smoke ball he and his crew reported as seeing. However, Chester was correct in mentioning the phrase "swarm of bees", as this would be used in reference to further encounters later on during 1944.

The Fifteenth Air Force raid on 28th January 1944 which attacked Aviano aerodrome in northern Italy definitely included another sighting of the "discs", one which suggested that they may well have been a new type of *Luftwaffe flak* munition rather than something possibly other-worldly. The crew involved was again from the 99th BG but they had already flown 26 missions, so were definitely experienced and different personnel from those who had given the previous day's report. The Special Narrative contained the following information:

"The flak was accurate as to altitude but off on deflection. It burst in a white puff, about the size of a B-17. The burst sprayed colored 'discs that looked like fireworks' for radius of perhaps 100 feet. The discs were described as about the size of a baseball and colored silver. Crewmen reported they 'flashed' in the air. (…) Crew was also questioned as to possibility of incendiary discs dropped from E/A above formation, but insisted it was fired from ground and that no E/A was above them."[476]

It is interesting to note that the crew were questioned as to whether these discs had been dropped by an aircraft, as was suggested by reports covering the September and October 1943 incidents. The discs encountered by the 99th BG in Italy sounded similar in appearance but if they were fired from the ground, that suggested a shell capable of carrying several dozen to cause a "spray" to develop on detonation.

Once again, these hockey puck-shaped objects were in all likelihood something other than "Foo Fighters" or UFOs as they were almost certainly fragments from some sort of *flak* burst. Given the numbers of reports, they appeared to be a tangible phenomenon, albeit a very odd one which had been witnessed on several occasions in 1943 and 1944. It was not the last report either. According to Kevin Mahoney's *Fifteenth Air Force Against the Axis: Combat Missions Over Europe During World War II*, silver discs were encountered by Consolidated B-24 Liberators from the 449th BG on a mission to attack airfields at Udine in Italy on 30th January 1944 (Mission #619). According to Mahoney, just before a group of *Luftwaffe* Messerschmitt Bf 109s and Focke-Wulf Fw 190s attacked, *"enemy aircraft reportedly dropped silver discs onto the formation that burst into flame."*[477]

I have researched the four aircraft that the 449th lost on that mission and three are recorded as being shot down over Udine. According to the Missing Air Crew Report filed at the time, B-24H 41-28605 *Sinners Dream* went down over the target as well, although

the cause was unknown as there were no witnesses to its demise. However, this did not prevent its loss being attributed to “enemy fighters”, as this would have been the most logical reason at the time in view of the other casualties. Eleven crew were onboard the Liberator, the eleventh man being a photographer. Six were killed and the rest taken prisoner. There are no references to any “silver discs” in the loss reports for the four B-24s that failed to return. However, a witness statement attached to the report regarding Lt Benjamin Kendall’s aircraft (41-29217), is interesting in light of Mahoney’s book. Staff Sergeant John Hash, who was the ball turret gunner in the B-24 flying above and to the right of ‘217, stated: *“As I looked down I could see the right wing on Lt Kendall’s ship ablaze. I also saw two enemy fighters diving on him and firing as they came.”* Mahoney had reported that the discs had burst into flames on contact with one of the aircraft’s wings. The 449th BG’s own *Special Narrative Report No.18* which covered this mission confirmed that the strange encounter occurred:

“Before the fighters attacked, silver discs were dropped from 2,000 to 3,000 feet above this flight. As they exploded bright flame and small white puffs giving the effect of hail in the ship [aircraft]. As soon as the bursts stopped, the fighters came in.”[478]

This would suggest that the discs were in fact some sort of previously unknown *flak* weapon, possibly one deployed on a very limited scale. The accompanying escort fighters from the 82nd FG reported that it was *“a new type of flak, with a round burst, spraying out beneath like a keyhole”*.[479] As escorts, they were presumably too far away from the cloud of “discs” to see them clearly enough.

Silver discs were also witnessed on 31st January 1944 by at least one crew belonging to the 450th BG, another of the Fifteenth Air Force’s bomber groups based in Italy, although this time a delivery aircraft was recorded. According to *Special Narrative Report No.20*, 33 B-24 Liberators were sent out to attack the aerodrome at Aviano:

"At 1303 hours, a Fw 190, which was cruising 2,000 feet above the formation, released a large number of what appeared to be shiny disks, which glittered in the sunshine with the evident intent of making our a/c break formation to avoid contact with these disks."[480]

In a letter to the *Dallas Times-Herald* published on 10th July 1947, in the wake of reports regarding the flying disc allegedly discovered near Roswell, New Mexico, former Staff Sgt. C. A. Smith stated that the disc phenomenon was nothing new. He reported having seen clusters of discs on two separate bombing missions over Germany during WW2. The former tail gunner with the "598th Bombardment Group" wrote:

"These disc-shaped objects would be in clusters until they reached a certain altitude, and then they would break up and attach themselves to bomber formations as if a metallic force drew them toward the bombers," "I saw these disc-shaped objects only twice during my tour of duty, but both times we drew an unbelievable flak (…) into our formation, which accounted for several bombers. It was useless to try to lose them by a sudden burst of speed, or by evasive actions, because when attached to your formation you couldn't shake them until the bombs were away. Then they would disappear at incredible speed."

Smith said the discs he saw appeared to be five or six feet in diameter and two or three feet thick. If the dimensions were correct, then these discs were twice as large than those reported on the Stuttgart and Schweinfurt raids. There was no such unit as the 598th BG, but there was a 598th Bombardment Squadron, part of the 397th BG based at Rivenhall in Essex, some forty miles north-east of London. The unit was equipped with twin-engined Martin B-26B Marauder medium bombers and moved to Hurn (now Bournemouth Airport) in order to support the D-Day landings in June 1944. Once airfields were captured on the Continent, the 598th began operations

from sites in France to support the Allied advance across Western Europe. I have not been able to find a “C. A. Smith” who served with the unit, however, that does not mean someone with that name was not with the squadron. Kevin Mahoney, author of the book about Fifteenth Air Force operations in the Mediterranean, also included more information about strange German tactics over northern Italy:

“By this time, the Luftwaffe used new defensive measures against bomber formations that included glide bombs, parachute bombs, and bombs suspended from cables to break up the formations and knock down the bombers.”[481]

These smack of sheer desperation by the Germans, but were these weapons systems reported by the author real? UFO researcher Andy Roberts eventually believed that the mysterious discs were little more than a new type of *Luftwaffe flak*, the puck shaped objects being a different type of shrapnel from the usual metal shards that radiated from shell bursts. However, my interest in German secret weapons had already been piqued by mention of fighters dropping the discs onto the bomber formation. If this was true, then the objects were clearly a type of device which I had never heard of, despite well over forty years spent reading about and researching wartime projects. I will examine the claims of secret weapons in connection with the alleged Nazi UFOs in another chapter, but the existence of a possible yet totally unheard of *flak* weapon, can be discussed here. I agree with Andy Roberts in that these small discs were probably some sort of experimental device, and I believe it was not officially sanctioned in terms of production capacity. The discs could well have been built and tested using just the resources available to individual *Staffeln* or *Gruppen*, which would explain the small numbers of aircraft involved and the ultimately ineffectual tactics that were employed. However, it is surprising that no German record of them exists.

The “silver discs” could also have been sub-munitions similar to those released by the detonation of what the *Luftwaffe* referred to as

an *Abwurfbehälter* (AB, or “drop container”), which today would be called a “cluster bomb”. However, the SD-1 and SD-2 sub-munitions released by the various AB canisters were not shaped like hockey pucks.[482] The first looked like a small mortar shell and the second was nicknamed “the Butterfly bomb” due to the thin metal “wings” which sprang outwards from their sub-munitions as they deployed. Both were dropped from at least 500 feet altitude, although they would not be used from the height of a bomber stream as any that missed enemy aircraft would undoubtedly fall on friendly territory. Unexploded SD-2s were lethal if they were disturbed or touched and were also hazardous to load onto ground-attack aircraft. The *Luftwaffe* armourers had a healthy respect for these bombs and nicknamed them *Teufelseier* (“Devil’s Eggs”). There were isolated reports of “butterfly bombs” being dropped on Allied bomber formations in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations in the summer of 1943: although seven separate incidents were listed in the Vol.2 No.24 issue of the *Weekly Air Intelligence Digest*, no dates, locations or mission details were provided.[483]

If such a weapon existed, it would probably have been a stand-off device, which would have allowed deployment just outside the effective range of the machine-guns carried by the American bombers. However, the equivalents that did exist were the Wfr.Gr. 21 air-to-air rocket mortar shell that was reported at other points during the Stuttgart raid, plus the Henschel Hs 298 and Ruhrstahl X-4 air-to-air missiles. Neither of the latter two weapons systems were even in development, let alone deployment, in September 1943. Thermobaric (“fuel-air explosive”) bombs were also designed and developed by the Germans but not deployed operationally. However, the Wfr.Gr. 21 had probably been deployed in the Mediterranean as early as 22nd August 1943, when American B-26 Marauder crews attacking targets around Naples witnessed *“rocket ammunition, bursting with white smoke unlike aerial bombs, was observed at a distance of 500 yards.”* They watched a German fighter pilot fire one of these projectiles from about 400 to 600 yards away, the weapon bursting *“75 to 100 feet away from the formation ‘like flak’. Most*

crews believed that the muzzle flash was similar to that of a rocket, and this was further substantiated by the observation of a believed rocket-gun trail, flowing about 25 feet behind the projectile as it shot through the air."[484] This sounded very much like the launch of a Wfr.Gr. 21. By mid-September US Air Intelligence was aware of the four types of *Luftwaffe* aircraft that could launch the Wfr.Gr. 21, the Bf 109, Fw 190, Bf 110 and Ju 88.[485] An extremely detailed combat report from a tail gunner onboard one of the 91st Bomb Group's B-17s provided plenty of details about one such rocket shell attack against the bombers in his particular combat "box".[486] However, the launch and trajectory of a Wfr.Gr. 21 was a lot different from the supposed ground-launched rockets, or shoals of little discs.

Different types of "rockets" were however on the agenda at the end of January 1944 as several reports had been received throughout the month from across the Eighth Air Force. According to Major L. R. Frost, the Flak Liaison Officer for the 3rd Bombardment Division:

"The unusual feature of the month was the appearance, in various quantities and manners, of ground rockets. They were reported in the coastal areas of France and from the coastal and interior areas of Germany. No great quantity was reported from any one place, the usual number being from one to eight. No known damage from the rockets was reported. The outstanding feature of the rocket seems to be the pyrotechnic display that it furnishes."[487]

It would make sense from a tactical point of view for the Germans to have fired rockets such as the *Scheinsignalrakete* fitted with decoy flares to throw the bombers off course if they were using markers to denote changes of course. However, flares were of lesser use in daylight and did not explain those that were observed coming out of the cloud layers below the bombers or seemingly launched from the ground during daytime raids. Subsequent reports suggested that a series of flares, suspended by small parachutes, were jettisoned from these devices.[488] Whatever these things were, the daytime

sightings did not appear to be decoys, and they certainly were not *flak* rockets as the *Luftwaffe* had yet to field an operational system, and would not have one available before the end of the war.

"Balloons" and "long black objects" were noted by several bomber crews over Frankfurt and Holland on 4th February 1944, but there are few details of these encounters beyond brief references in the official files. Pilots of the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt long-range escort fighters of the 353rd Fighter Group at Metfield in Suffolk were assigned to support the 3rd Task Force of bombers attacking aerodromes in France the following day. Whilst escorting the bombers in the Sancerre area, they noticed a *"white smoking object, size of a small bomb in corkscrew twist, seen spiralling downwards in this area"*.[489] It is likely that it was either part of a damaged aircraft or a jettisoned fuel tank spewing out the remaining drops of fuel.

A crew from the 544th BS, part of the 384th BG at Grafton Underwood, the same Group which had encountered the cloud of discs over Stuttgart several months earlier, reported seeing another strange object on 8th February 1944. On this occasion, they were attacking a piston ring factory at Frankfurt-am-Main in Germany. 1/Lt. Robert L. Robinson was the pilot of B-17G 42-31364/SU-D *Nuttall's Nuthouse* that day, flying in the position of "high squadron lead" for the 544th's "combat box". Taking off from Grafton Underwood at 0808 hours, they joined the formation of bombers in their assigned position and headed for Frankfurt. At 1128, the bombardier, 1/Lt. H. Kramer, toggled the release switch to drop the B-17's load of 12 500lb bombs on the target. According to the 384th BG mission report, at the time of bomb release, Robinson was flying at an altitude of 23,900 feet. He reported seeing the following:

"Ball-like object; looked silvery and was stationary at 30,000'. Was no chute supporting it; did not see it fired from ground and we had it under observation for about 15 minutes. As we made our turn over the target it was at 9 o'clock."[490]

Once the 544th's Intelligence Officer was informed of the sighting, he passed on the details to the 384th BG's intelligence staff. The same day, Major W. E. Dolan, Grafton Underwood's S-2 Officer, sent a memo to the 41st Combat Bombardment Wing's Air Intelligence Section, entitled "Unusual Tactics of E/A or AA Gun Fire". It read as follows:

"No attacks made on our formation today. Ball like object, appeared silvery, hung in air at 30,000 feet. No chute was observed to be attached to the object, and it remained under observation for approximately fifteen (15) minutes by the crew while in the target area. The crew did not see the object fired from the ground."[491]

The chapter on RAF sightings mentions three "Zeppelins" that were noted by aircrew on a mission to Schweinfurt on the night of 24th/25th February 1944. During the day on the 24th, the US Eighth Air Force had sent its bombers out to attack the same target, and an even stranger object was recorded during this raid, earning another name which soon entered the lexicon of the hard-pressed intelligence staff trying to make sense of the "Foo Fighter" sightings. According to the relevant report, the following was seen by at least one crew:

"A short distance from the target, as described in Consolidated FLO Report No.201 as 'a swarm of bees' was again observed. It was reported to be about the size of a barrel, red-brown in colour and apparently motionless. There is as yet no explanation of this occurrence."[492]

My copy of *Report No.201* is almost unreadable due to the poor state of the scanned document, however the "swarm of bees" reference relates to earlier sightings on daylight missions to Frankfurt on 29th January 1944 and Brunswick the following day. This phenomenon is also described in No.201 as a mass of brown discs, three feet in diameter, several of which struck the propellers of

at least one bomber during the Brunswick raid. What is strange about this report is that the aircraft involved sustained no actual damage from this incident.[493] Ground-launched rocket projectiles were also noted, although it was not suggested that the "swarm of bees" had been ejected from them.[494] A similar sighting occurred on 16th March when crews attacking targets at Augsburg encountered this phenomenon. It led to *"an unusually large number of reports"* being submitted.[495]

The "swarm of bees" phenomena was discussed at length in an undated 1944 report which stretched over two pages. Several theories were put forward as to their purpose, one being a method of obtaining ballistic corrections data for what was called "unseen *flak*", i.e. anti-aircraft shells fired blind in the direction of bomber formations from below cloud cover. It was believed that these objects could have been connected with the "confetti *flak*" reported in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations, but the exact method of relaying targeting information to the ground units was not explained. Another line of thought suggested that the "swarms" contained phosphorus or incendiary devices. This was believed to be the most credible explanation, although aircraft had flown through the clusters of small objects, which meant that it was not necessarily true. The last option was equally strange:

"[They may be] small pieces of paper or analogous material and that the phenomena is fired in the hope that some of the particles may be sucked in by the air intakes of our aircraft, clogging and then causing the engines to stop functioning."

It was also claimed that several bombers had their intakes blocked up by Window, the narrow strips of foil used to jam German radar, and engines had soon overheated to the point where they had stopped working.[496] *FLO Report No.220* included a further sighting of the "swarm", this time during the raid on Kassel on 19th March 1944. They were also mentioned in other reports, including one by Major E. R. T. Holmes of the 1st Bombardment Division, although it

was suggested that the numbers of sightings was decreasing.[497] Despite this analysis, nothing was found in the *Luftwaffe flak* archives after the war to explain what these objects were. The theory that they were some type of incendiary device makes sense, as does the one suggesting they were some sort of material designed to stop engines from working, however they may have been something else entirely. Other methods for wreaking havoc with aircraft engines were given as a possible explanation for the “Foo Fighters” but we will visit this in Chapter 13.

Meanwhile, senior officers were gearing up for the impending invasion of northern France. General Spaatz, commanding USSTAF, put together a group of specialists that became the Air Technical Intelligence branch, their remit being the investigation and exploitation of the enemy’s scientific and technological achievements. The success of this branch would hinge on the Army Air Force’s ability to conduct effective air operations, and Spaatz wanted his crews to have the best equipment possible, especially in the field of radar and radio counter-measures. On 4th March 1944, the Advisory Specialist Group (ASG) was formed, with David T. Griggs as one of its members. Griggs was considered the top American radar specialist, and was on the staff of Edward Bowles, an advisor to the US Secretary of War in Washington DC. The radar specialist was effectively given a free hand in discussing any technical information. Also among the list of civilian specialists was Howard Robertson. Both Griggs and Robertson were now members of virtually every major military and civilian scientific group in Europe. Robertson was also on the so-called “bigot list”, which meant he had knowledge of the actual D-Day invasion plans, one of just a handful of American scientists “in the know”.

The raid on Munster which occurred on 11th March 1944 led to reports of “balls of fire” being submitted on the crews’ return to England. Whatever these were, they were spotted over the target area. However, intelligence staff did not know whether the phenomenon was associated with ground-launched rockets or if they were something completely different.[498]

Strange Company lists a report by a B-17 crewman who saw a "probable Me 163" over France on 25th April 1944. The witness twice saw what he described as a "black, teardrop-shaped craft" approach within a couple of miles of the bomber formation, passing directly in front of his bomber at one point.[499] However, the explanation that was given at the time could not have been correct, but this was not stressed in the book. The Me 163 *Komet* was not tested over France and when the type finally became operational later in 1944, flights briefly took place from a base in Holland and then all activities switched to an airfield near Leipzig. It would not have been possible for one of these rocket-powered interceptors to have operated over France. It is therefore not clear what was witnessed.

More "rockets" were noticed by American B-17 crews whilst en route to bomb targets around Villacoublay on 20th May 1944. Once again, they were believed to have been fired from the ground and were described as being more accurate than previous encounters. Although no aircraft were downed by the projectiles, it suggests that if these were German surface-to-air missiles, they were being developed to a point where they could be used as a weapon.[500] However, the bombers were flying at altitudes of between 23,000 and 26,000 feet so it is still unclear which particular *flak* or decoy rocket was being used here – if these were actually rockets. No German weapons of this nature were tested in France around this time, let alone guided anti-aircraft missiles. One of the monthly Flak Reports issued at the time included the following statement:

"Ground rockets continue to be reported on nearly every mission. By and large these rockets are seen in pairs, sometimes in fours, and the total number seen in any one area varies from twelve to twenty. As yet the rockets are highly inaccurate, bursting with an appreciably larger burst than the usual flak-burst."[501]

If true, over a dozen "rockets" being fired at the same time suggested that the *Luftwaffe* anti-aircraft defences possessed

weapons that wartime historians are still not aware of to this day. Yet these projectiles were still being reported, and according to this particular report, during practically every mission the 3rd Bombardment Division flew in May 1944. It had five bomber wings and fourteen groups assigned to it, so there was potential for a relatively small number of reports spread out over a much larger number of units, but the menace believed to be posed by these “rockets” was considered worthy of continued commentary. More sightings were reported in August 1944, but Air Intelligence seemed no nearer in finding out the exact type of *flak* rocket that the Germans were employing. It was suggested that Allied smoke markers may have been the culprits, and simple misidentification was to blame.[502]

The first Air Technical Intelligence (ATI) teams landed in northern France just two days after the invasion on 6th June 1944. Together with members of the so-called “T-Force” (“T” = Target), their goal was to seize, inspect and remove equipment, paperwork and personnel from rocket sites, associated facilities and radar stations. In a bid to streamline what was initially a rather chaotic process, with teams of intelligence staff roaming the countryside without knowing what their colleagues were doing, General Eisenhower created a committee that set up a “Black List” of priority targets, graded by type. Seven separate working parties were also established, each armed with a list of research facilities and testing sites. Howard Robertson spent three weeks looking at V-1 launch sites in northern France, during this time he and David Griggs met up with Luis W. Alvarez, another specialist in the field of radar, who had tested an early form of Ground Controlled Approach at selected airbases in Britain during the summer 1943. Alvarez had also worked on the atom bomb at Los Alamos in the spring of 1944. Both men saw V-1 flying bombs heading for London in late June.[503] All three were now at the centre of a large intelligence-gathering mission based in the UK, presumably with access to reports of unconventional aircraft, “rockets” and other strange flying objects that were being reported by crews at this time.

Strange objects were also noticed flying at extreme altitudes. In 1995, a CUFOS investigator, Max Calderwood, was contacted by a former USAAF fighter pilot who had served in Italy during the summer of 1944. Back then, 26-year old Walt Humphrey had flown Lockheed P-38 Lightnings with the 1st Fighter Group, operating out of Salsola airfield. On an unspecified day in June 1944, he led a flight of three P-38s on a training flight out over the Adriatic, heading northwards along the eastern coast of Italy. Just off the coast north of Bari, the following encounter with a large round object, silver in colour, took place:

"The object appeared directly above us. I estimated my height at the time to be 33,000 feet. It was originally at around 50,000 feet, then descended to 40,000 and stayed with us for about three minutes. Over the radio, we discussed what it could be, as it was very large. Suddenly, it accelerated to the north, disappearing in a second or two."[504]

Humphrey and his colleagues were questioned by his commanding officer, Colonel Robert B. Richard, as the sighting was so unusual. The conclusion drawn was that the object was a German secret weapon. It was described as being three times the size of the Moon.

Further high-flying objects, noted at heights of 47,000 feet or more, were also spotted over the Normandy area, apparently during July 1944. Observers had tracked what were believed to be *Luftwaffe* aircraft operating at extremely high altitudes. The flight profiles which had been recorded were passed by American air intelligence staff to A.I.2(g), the British Air Ministry's German aircraft section for comment, although this request was not made until 14th September. From the wording of the document, it is unclear whether the sightings were actually in July or if they occurred towards the end of August and beginning of September.

"During the past three weeks, operating on height-finding equipment located in the Normandy Beach area have observed targets flying at

extremely high altitude. The general indication is that of a small plane. Rate of climb to 40,000 feet is fairly rapid, above that, to 45,000 feet, about 2,000 feet per minute, thereafter, slowing down to 1,000 feet per minute at higher levels. Rate of descent observed from 47,000 to 30,000 feet on one instance was 5,000 feet per minute."

It was suggested that the mysterious "aircraft", possibly a small type of craft such as a fighter, had at one stage reached 66,000 feet. A.I.2(g) could not offer much in the way of assistance beyond a vague idea of which *Luftwaffe* aircraft type might have been responsible:

"The only German aircraft which may be capable, under certain conditions, of attaining the high altitudes mentioned, is the Me 163 rocket-propelled fighter. We have no information, however, that this aircraft has been equipped for operations at these altitudes and on the evidence of the report it cannot be concluded that the targets were in fact aircraft of this type."[505]

66,000 feet was extremely high for WW2. It almost suggested some sort of stratospheric machine, possibly one of the much-rumoured German secret weapons that were believed to be under test for a future bombing attack on New York. However, Allied air intelligence staff obviously believed that the Germans had aircraft capable of reaching at least 47,000 feet and in some cases as high as 66,000 feet. The diminutive *Komet* was suggested as the only candidate that could reach such altitudes, but was this correct? Did the *Luftwaffe* actually have aircraft capable of reaching these heights?

The Me 163 was never going to be a contender, as it had a combat ceiling of just 40,000 feet. In any case, none were operated in France and its endurance was so short that the type could never have flown over the Normandy beachheads. The only reason to fly at ultra-high altitudes was to take photographs, so that meant a reconnaissance machine. Jet aircraft can be ruled out as well,

because the only one to have operated anywhere near the invasion beaches was Arado Ar 234 V7 (the seventh prototype, *werke nummer* 130007, coded T9+MH), which started flying a series of reconnaissance missions on 2nd August 1944 from Juvincourt near Paris. It was not even in France during July. In addition, the twin-engined *Blitz's* ceiling was less than 35,000 feet.

However, in July 1944, two *Luftwaffe* aircraft types could definitely have reached altitudes in excess of 40,000 feet. Both of these were able to fly at heights well above that, although 66,000 feet was beyond their capabilities. The first was the Junkers Ju 86 reconnaissance aircraft, a high-altitude version of the original pre-war twin-engined bomber that had been tested in combat as far back as 1937 in the Spanish Civil War.[506] Fitted with a pressurised cockpit and elongated wings, forty older Ju 86E bombers were converted to the P-series variant. They started flying reconnaissance missions over Britain during late 1940 at altitudes approaching 39,000 feet and carried out the same flights over Russia from June 1941 onwards. By the summer of 1942, Ju 86P-2 high-altitude recce aircraft were reaching 49,000 feet due to improvements in their Jumo 207 supercharged diesel engines. However, one was shot down by a specially-modified Spitfire Mk.V over Egypt in August 1942, causing the type to be withdrawn from service soon afterwards. A further development of the Ju 86, the R-series, only resulted in a few prototypes being constructed. These were able to reach 52,500 feet with the assistance of nitrous oxide injection into the engines. They were in service by mid-1942 but the small handful of Spitfire Mk HF.IXs could attain 45,000 feet, with the standard Mk.IXs managing 43,000 feet.[507] By July 1944, a few Ju 86Rs were still languishing on *Luftwaffe* airfields, but they had been removed from all active duties.

The second high-flying *Luftwaffe* candidate also fitted the timeframe. By 1943, Messerschmitt was busy developing a high-altitude version of the famous Bf 109F single-seat fighter. This new variant was designated the H-series, these aircraft using a standard Bf 109F-4 airframe fitted with a pressurised cockpit and a Daimler-

Benz DB 601 engine boosted by GM-1 nitrous oxide. In May 1944, a few Bf 109H-1 production aircraft were delivered to *Fernaufklärungsgruppe* 123 (FAGr. 123, or "Long Range Reconnaissance Group 123") at Guyancourt, near Paris for photographic missions over the Allied lines and along the Channel. These aircraft were similar to the Bf 109F-4/Z which could attain 39,000 feet but had inboard wing sections inserted and the main undercarriage units also moved outwards. The Bf 109H-1's normal service ceiling was 47,900 feet but pilots managed to reach 49,200 feet using one particular machine, *werke nummer* 110073, which was used to complete several reconnaissance missions over the Normandy beachheads in June and July 1944.[508] Its rate of climb was also over 2,000 feet per minute.[509]

Whilst even the H-1 variants could not reach the dizzying heights of 66,000 feet, they were still the highest-flying *Luftwaffe* machines available for operations at the time of the Allied reports and therefore are the most likely candidates if the mysterious high-flying machines were indeed aircraft. The mention of 66,000 feet has never been verified and may well have been an error in the use of the optical height finders used, especially as aircraft were not tracked at such altitudes. If a mistake was made, it is likely that a FAGr. 123 Bf 109H-1 was responsible for the sightings over Normandy instead of something anomalous.

Once the Allies had landed in Normandy in June 1944, it was important that Air Intelligence drafted a list of questions to be put to any captured *Luftwaffe flak* gun crews on the Continent to help in the ensuing daylight offensive against German targets. A list of such questions was drawn up and a memo was then sent by Eighth Air Force Headquarters to Air Disarmament Command on 20th August 1944. It was clear that the reports of mysterious rockets had been considered before the list was drawn up. Included were the following questions:

"Have anti-aircraft rockets been used in the defences where you have been? Were they effective? Describe the rocket site. Where

was it located?"[510]

It has not been possible to locate any of the completed questionnaires, but they would not have yielded much information as the Germans did not have any operational *flak* rockets with which to deploy in France.

A *Special Flak Report* produced by the 42nd Bomb Wing based in Italy, covering September and October 1944, listed "Mysterious Phenomena" among its various talking points. It appeared that those pesky little discs had returned:

"On 18 October, several bursts of possible rocket flak were reported from Sestri Levanti. They were large red bursts, 500 feet above the formation. Also on 18 October, a shower of silver objects about the size of silver dollars was reported in the vicinity of Alfonsine. These objects were seen floating at 10,500 feet and descending very slowly."[511]

By September 1944, Allied Air Intelligence was only too aware of the new German secret weapons that had either just entered service or were about to. A fairly comprehensive report appeared that month regarding the air-launched versions of the V-1 flying bomb, its radio navigation aids and how stocks of the weapon were moved around by road.[512] The Allies were also cognisant of the jet- and rocket-propelled aircraft types entering service with the *Luftwaffe*, including the Ar 234 *Blitz*, Me 163 *Komet* and Me 262. However, the information was not totally reliable as a briefing document from July 1944 suggested that the Dornier Do 335 *Pfeil* ("Arrow") was jet-propelled when in fact it was powered by two piston engines, one pushing and one pulling.[513] Looking back with a working knowledge of these aircraft and weapons, it is clear that none matched the descriptions of the strange objects and lights that were being encountered over Europe. However, at that time, Allied intelligence staff were not entirely aware of just what these secret weapons could achieve in terms of performance, and what the Germans still had in

the pipeline. “Rockets” that delivered “parachute *flak*” were also being discussed in official reports, although it was made clear in official documents that the parachutes appeared to have various different objects suspended from them. Their purpose was still unclear.[514]

Also during the same month, the American Combined Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee (CIOS) met for the first time. CIOS had been formed in mid-August to rationalise the previous system of intelligence and technology gathering activities in liberated Europe. T-Forces were already busy just behind the Allied front lines, seizing facilities, searching through paperwork and protecting the sites from looters before ATI teams could arrive. CIOS formed its own air technical intelligence missions to assist and augment General Spaatz’s USSTAF ATI personnel. There was now a huge demand for specialists to man these units. Among those present at the first CIOS meeting, held in London on 6th September 1944, was Col. Howard McCoy, Chief of the Air Technical Section and a former Chief of the Propeller Laboratory at Wright Field.[515] He would go onto direct Operation *Lusty*, the acquisition and shipment of captured *Luftwaffe* aircraft to Wright Field after the end of the war in Europe and would feature again in more than one aspect of UFO history in the late 1940s.

An undated document from 1944 gave more information about some of the types of phenomenon that aircrews were encountering, although the reports were placed in the context of *flak* weapons:

“Recently and over a period of months, particularly from aircrew flying from the United Kingdom, reports of ground-fired enemy flak rocket projectiles have been received with increasing frequency. This type [of] fire has been met on both day and night missions and from widely separated areas. Because of the possibility of confusion of various types of rockets and with various other phenomena, early reports were received with a questioning attitude. However, combat photos of 19 March taken on a mission over northern France showed

rockets in flight which appeared to be unmistakeably ground-fired."[516]

The photos did not accompany the report and I have not been able to find copies of them. It is possible that these were an unguided ground-to-air rocket such as *Taifun*, or early versions of either the *Fliegerfaust* man-portable surface-to-air launcher or the Hs 297 unguided rocket, but none of these were used in trials in northern France during WW2. In addition, none of the other German *flak* rockets were tested there either, which would only leave the *Scheinsignalrakete* as a possible contender. It is not entirely clear whether this device was used outside Germany, but even if it was, the numbers of sightings suggest it was employed on a much larger scale than has been recorded. Many wartime historians have never even heard of this decoy rocket! The *Scheinsignalrakete*, an unguided missile capable of delivering decoy flares and other small pyrotechnics to an altitude of around 8,000 feet, may well have been responsible for some of the wartime sightings, but only for those reported at lower altitudes. Evidence of this was contained in the same report:

"Reports of the rocket 'trace' indicate many different colors; the bursts are usually described as being considerably larger than those of heavy flak shells and are usually of a red or reddish-orange color. Occasionally they appear to split into numerous colored fragments. There have been reports of rockets emitting red flares on bursting, which flares in some instances have been said to hang in the sky, apparently suspended from small parachutes, for appreciable periods of time. These latter may have an entirely different purpose than the ordinary rocket projectile, probably being used as 'markers' or guides for enemy aircraft. The wide variety of colors of trace and burst of the usual rocket shell is not believed to have any particular significance but may be the result of experiments in different types of propellant and filling."[517]

Due to the small amount of propellant it carried, the *Scheinsignalrakete* rocket could not reach the 20,000 or 24,000 feet altitudes that many of the reports recorded. However, the multi-coloured flares and suggestions they were used as “fighter flares” are accurate if describing the role of such a device, if not its operating limits. The report continued with references to these rockets bursting at various altitudes from 10,000 to 30,000 feet, with most around the 20,000 feet mark, mentioning their inaccuracy. Of course, this would not necessarily have mattered too much if they were simply a method of delivering decoy flares. However, the same report suggested that some of the witnesses believed that these missiles were possibly rocket-assisted shells of an otherwise ordinary nature, fired from standard heavy *flak* guns. Given the Allies encountered difficulties in manufacturing rocket shells themselves, these suggestions were branded as implausible. On a positive note for the intelligence staff who were trying to make sense of the strange reports, September 1944 seemed to be the zenith of “rocket” sightings and the numbers plummeted afterwards. After a month or so, the regular *flak* reports were not even including mentions of them, nor gave any explanation as to what they had been. The moratorium on German *flak* rocket development did not take effect until the end of January 1945 and therefore one would have expected to have seen increased capabilities if these devices were being tested and refined. Whatever respite the hard-pressed intelligence analysts had received was only short-lived, however, since a new batch of sightings, featuring an entirely different phenomenon, was about to land in their laps.

A memo dated 1st September 1944 attempted to summarise what was known – or believed – about the state of German anti-aircraft rockets at that time. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that the experimental *flak* rockets were never deployed operationally, or even test-fired with live warheads against enemy bombers. With this in mind, it is interesting to see what the *flak* specialists thought in late 1944, and also wonder about just aircrews were actually witnessing in the skies over Europe instead. Sent from Major H. F.

King, the 2nd Bombardment Wing's Flak Liaison Officer, to M.I.15 at the War Office in Whitehall, London, it read as follows:

"Reference your M.I.15/P/GEN/5132 dated 29 August 1944, I agree with Major Nicholson that crews are at present suffering from a rocket complex, but I am also sure that the enemy are using AA rockets to a limited extent. I have already expressed the opinion that the majority of rockets reported by American crews by day are in fact the smoke markers which are invariably dropped by the lead aircraft of each formation, but there has been plenty of evidence to support the view that the following types of rockets are being used:

a) *A normal AA Rocket propelling an exceptionally large calibre shell.*
b) *Pyrotechnic rockets.*

The first type is characterized by a very large puff of black oily smoke, and a thin white smoke trail which is seen before the projectile bursts. These appear to be fired either singly or in pairs and are normally inaccurate, although they have tended to become more accurate in recent months. The second type takes various forms such as 'scarecrows', parachute flares, etc., some of which are probably intended as directional indicators for fighters although there has been little evidence to support this view.
If any of the enemy's rockets are radar or acoustic controlled they have certainly not been at all successful, and I am more inclined to the view that the enemy relies on the size of the projectile for results. Why he does not fire them in larger salvoes remains a mystery, but possibly they are still in an experimental stage. The fact that smoke trails are often seen indicates that some form of propellant remains attached to the projectile until it bursts, and it may well be this burning propellant which gives the impression of tracer at night.

The fact that the enemy is very 'rocket conscious' gives credence to the belief that some forms of AA Rockets do exist. It seems only logical that the enemy should experiment with this form of weapon,

considering the very important part which his AA defences are now playing in the defence of Germany."[518]

It is worth noting here that Major King seemed convinced that the *Luftwaffe* had deployed *flak* rockets operationally, but that they were probably still at an experimental stage. The latter was certainly true, but not the former. Of course, none of the FLOs or air intelligence staff knew that at the time. The reports of "rockets" had been received for two years, yet all the specialists had to explain their presence were vague ideas of new secret weapons.

The bomber crews were not the only Americans to see odd flying objects over Occupied Europe. On 3rd October 1944, pilots from the 4th Fighter Group flying Republic P-47 Thunderbolts were extremely surprised to see *"approximately 100 yellow, semi-transparent balloons about 1 foot in diameter at 2-3,000 feet at W-1052 and V-9153."*[519] The location of the two grid references are unknown but presumably related to a point behind enemy lines. The nature of these objects is still to be determined.

Sometime during late 1944, or maybe even in early 1945, since the exact date is unknown, another P-47 Thunderbolt pilot, this time flying over the Neustadt area of Germany, apparently had a strange encounter:

"We were flying west of Neustadt when a golden sphere, which shone with a metallic glitter, appeared, slowly moving through the sky. The sun was not far above the skyline, which made it difficult to say whether or not the sun's rays were reflected from it or whether the glow came from within the ball itself."

The witness was not named, nor was his unit given. A second P-47 pilot witnessed *"a golden, or phosphorescent ball, which appeared to be four or five feet in diameter, flying 2,000 feet higher up."*[520] Whilst the above accounts appeared an article by Harold T. Wilkins in *Fate* magazine during 1951, the author had lifted the details from Jo Chamberlin's piece that was published in the December 1945

issue of *American Legion Magazine.* It is not known where Chamberlin obtained these reports from, although having been General Henry “Hap” Arnold’s attaché during the war, he was probably given access to restricted intelligence documents or had spoken directly to the pilots concerned whilst he was on a fact-finding tour of US squadrons in early 1945 at the behest of his boss.

As the V-2 offensive on London and Antwerp was well underway by the end of 1944, it was not surprising that American aircrews on daylight raids flying over Holland and western Germany reported seeing rocket launches and occasionally projectiles whizzing past their formations. However, these reports were very different from the mysterious objects that had been seen by crews over the previous two years. The following account is included to demonstrate the type of detail that was recorded during an encounter with a V-2 in November 1944, and how it differed from reports of strange items:

“Description of a V-2 rocket launched in Germany was given by a Fortress waist gunner, S/Sgt John W. McDowell, who claims to have seen the projectile as it flashed by within 500 yards of the bomber. A gunner of a squadron lead bomber, he made the following claim to intelligence officers, after a mission striking at railroad marshalling yards at Hamm…

‘First, I caught a glimpse of a contrail shooting up about 10,000 feet below us… Then, before I could bat an eye, the rocket was flashing by at our altitude of 24,000 feet. I had a momentary fright because it looked like the thing was going to hit us, but it passed to our left, near enough so that it would have been within gun range if it hadn’t been so fast. I could see the rocket, just in a flash of a second. It looked long, perhaps about 40 feet, and cylindrical, with a pointed nose and bulging in the center. Behind it came the stream of contrails.

The contrail was bluish white, about the dimensions of a contrail which would come from one Fortress engine, except that of course the rocket contrail was going straight up. It was like a pencil streak in the sky. It seemed as though a spray gun had shot bluish white paint straight up from the earth.

In a minute or two, the contrail began to dissolve. I followed it up until it had reached what I would judge was 40,000 to 50,000 feet, and then it began to disappear. In the same vicinity there were contrails from at least six other rockets. I don't think the Germans could have been firing them at our formation, as it must have been just pure chance that we went through this area when the rockets were coming up.
I could hear no noise from the rocket, as I looked out my waist window. It was the fastest thing I ever hope to see. It was just weird, that's all."[521]

In early July 1947, following news of the flying discs (but before reports of the find at Roswell made the headlines), Casimir J. Bidas of Richmond Hill, New York, wrote to the War Department in Washington DC with details of a sighting whilst flying as part of a B-24 Liberator crew in Italy during WW2. Bidas served with the 783rd BS, part of the 465th BG based at Pantanella, near Foggia in Italy. Although he could not remember the exact date on when the incident occurred, he provided a list of missions that he believed represented the period in question. The list of sixteen missions covered the period 12th October to 29th December 1944. Bidas believed that Air Intelligence would have information on file that could verify his information.

"This was a bit out of the ordinary at the time to believe, and many arguments arose as to the fact that it could be a wing tank jettisoned from a fighter escort, however the men said it was not of this nature. Later possibilities arose that it was 'chaff' being dispersed from the aircraft. The answer was given that this object, so called a disc, was from 15 to 20 feet in diameter and of silvery substance as given in the report by Sgt. [Theodore] Puckett and S/Sgt. [Francis] Mulrooney. Should these records be available, this matter could be confirmed. It was the 55th Wing, 465th Bomb Group and 783rd Sqd under the name of Lt. Harold Shoener. I was on Lt. Shoener's crew

until he was killed on Jan 20, 1945, with those who witnessed the flying disc, and I am one of the three original crew members left."[522]

The Republic P-47 Thunderbolt and North American P-51 Mustang escort fighters usually carried drop tanks under each wing to extend their radius of action. If enemy aircraft were spotted or the tanks ran dry, they could be jettisoned so the aircraft's manoeuvrability was not affected. The scant details given by Bidas are intriguing, given that they appear to match the Stuttgart sighting, albeit with a huge difference in terms of the size of the "discs" involved. His letter was passed to Air Intelligence but what follow-up action, if any, was taken is unknown.

1945

If anyone thought that the daylight bomber offensive had seen the last of strange object reports, then they would have been dismayed to find that *Consolidated FLO Report No.246* from January 1945 made reference to "silver balls" that were witnessed by Ninth Air Force crews at altitudes under 10,000 feet. The Ninth provided tactical support to ground forces rather than the strategic bombers of the Eighth, and therefore flew at much lower altitudes. However, details of the encounters beyond this brief reference are not known, although the report did mention that their origin and purpose remained unknown.[523] However, the next FLO report did include a report from "two experienced observers" who were engaged in separate operations over enemy territory. Each of these airmen were of the opinion that the "silver balls" comprised bundles of Window foil strips which tumbled or "spun" as they fell to earth. According to the report, this explanation seemed likely "though the evidence is not conclusive".[524]

Official recognition of strange aerial phenomenon appeared in a report about German capabilities in 1945 written by the Office of the Director of Air Intelligence on 19th January 1945. In the section headed *Potentialities and Prospect of Increasing Effectiveness of*

Flak Defenses During 1945, no less than three separate phenomena were listed. They were classed as “unexplained” and are reprinted in full here:

“The following unexplained phenomena have been reported recently, and might conceivably result in some new development in the future:

a) Large numbers of silver spheres, alternatively described as glass balls, balls of cotton wool, etc. have been reported during the past year at various altitudes; latterly at lower levels (up to 10,000 ft). It has been suggested that they may be intended as some form of check on radar information or that they may be filled with some type of gas or other material designed to interfere with the functioning of aircraft engines. Similar suggestions were made with respect to what was known as the “Swarm of Bees” phenomenon. As far as is known, no damage has yet been definitely ascribed to the presence of these phenomena.

b) The “scarecrow” flare, which has been observed for a long time, continues to be reported, but no confirmation of the existence of any ammunition which would account for it has yet been obtained from documents or prisoners. It is generally though to simulate an aircraft falling in flames: presumably being employed with a view to prejudicing the morale of aircrews. In spite of a few rare cases of slight damage sustained as a result of one of these projectiles bursting at very close range, it is not thought that they are lethal in the accepted sense of the term.

c) Two cases have been reported, and others rumored, of interference with the functioning of engines or radio, presumably as a result of some form of electrical jamming. No information has, however, been received as to any specific apparatus which might have been responsible for these occurrences.”[525]

“Scarecrow” flares had been reported by the RAF too, especially at night, and they were also referred to as “flaming onions”. As the report stated, both Allied Air Intelligence staff and aircrew believed these flares to be a German device intended to lower morale by

simulating an exploding bomber. Of course, no such item existed, and the large bursts were indeed Allied bombers exploding in mid-air after receiving a direct hit by *flak.* The multi-coloured after-effects were various target markers or distress flares “cooking off” as the remains of the bombers plummeted from the skies.

The reference to suspected interference with engines or radios was clearly new, although suspicions of a new secret weapon responsible for failures in equipment had been circulating for some time by that stage. One of the two cases possibly referred to an incident which occurred in October 1944 when four Republic P-47 Thunderbolts belonging to the 366th FS, part of the 358th FG, each reported problems with their engines and radios whilst flying in the vicinity of Strasbourg. As all four aircraft experienced problems at the same time, it was suggested that a new German secret weapon, perhaps an electrical disruption force projected from the ground, may well have been responsible. The pilots managed to manipulate their throttle controls and none of the P-47s were lost, however the incident was considered serious enough that a memo was sent to the War Department in Washington that explained what had happened. Like the report of the “discs” in September 1943, this eventually reached the top echelons of the USAAF, and General “Hap” Arnold received a copy. He took this matter very seriously, asking for a conference with the Assistant Chief Air Staff, Intelligence and Dr Bowles, advisor to the Secretary for War. A few days later, on 28th October 1944, Arnold contacted General Spaatz and advised him to have David Griggs familiarise himself with the incident and question those involved if necessary. Whilst nothing seemed to result from Griggs’ involvement, it demonstrated that he was certainly investigating strange phenomenon directly.[526] This would not be the last occasion which his name popped up in connection with weird incidents. On a slightly different note, in 1968 an Italian author claimed that two secret projects had the capacity to cause such incidents, although proof to back up his statements was sadly lacking. We shall look at these devices in Chapter 13 and 14.

The first of the three phenomena listed in the January 1945 report was the most interesting and relevant as related to the “Foo Fighters”. Here were objects that defied all rational attempts to describe them or place them within Germany’s plethora of wartime secret weapons projects. Glass balls encountered at altitude reminded me of the infamous “cube within a sphere” object that was reported by US Navy pilots off the East Coast of America in 2015, although I am not suggesting that they were the same phenomenon. “Silver balls” were reported by at least one crew from the 379th BG on 3rd March 1945. They were recorded as *“balloon-like silver balls”*, being noted somewhere in the vicinity of the Zuider Zee, Holland. The crew concerned had already seen no less than five V-2 launches in the same area at around the same time.[527] The glass ball phenomenon was also mentioned in a further memo which was sent to Brig.-Gen. George C. McDonald, Director of Intelligence, US Strategic Air Forces in Europe, and also circulated among five other intelligence officers, including Col. Kingman Douglass, who has already been mentioned in connection with the strange clouds of little discs witnessed in September and October 1943.[528] It is therefore a fact that very senior members of USAAF Air Intelligence had been made aware of the strange aerial objects that crews from the Eighth, Ninth and Fifteenth Air Forces were reporting.

However, it would be safe to say that the same high-ranking intelligence officers were looking for terrestrial explanations for the phenomenon, and specifically connected with German secret weapons research, including rumours of potentially war-winning devices. Flying saucers and UFOs were still a couple of years away in the future. The possibility that the mysterious lights and objects were not man-made, never mind German, would never have been considered. Indeed, the same evaluation report drafted on 19th January 1945 also included further details regarding a possible explanation for the “Foo Fighters”. Even the name of the weapon was similar. There were also other disturbing suggestions for potential secret weapons that might influence the course of the air war over Europe. In the section titled “Other Weapons”, the “Phoo

Bomb" was mentioned, which apparently had been reported by numerous individuals, friend and foe alike.

"Occasionally reports by pilots and the testimony of prisoners of war and escapees describe this weapon as a radio-controlled, jet-propelled, still-nosed, short-range, high performance ramming weapon, for use against bombing formations. Its speed is estimated at 525 mph, and it is estimated to have an endurance of 25 minutes. These bombs are launched from local airfields, and are radio-controlled, either from the ground, or possibly by aircraft. The few instances reported by pilots indicate no success. They have passed over formations and performed various antics in the vicinity of formations. It is believed that in order to be effective some 100/200 would have to be launched against a formation, and it is also believed that they will not be produced in sufficient quantities to prove a real menace in 1945."[529]

Although the report gave a broad description of the source of these reports, finding specific references to actual cases involving "Phoo Bombs" has proven impossible. It was certainly a term used by several newspapers at the time, but its origin is unclear beyond a possible spelling mistake on the part of a reporter or editor. The Germans did not develop any radio-controlled ramming weapons during WW2, although plans for at least three separate manned aircraft with this function in mind were drafted. These will be examined later in this book, as they were specifically mentioned in connection with another set of secret weapons suggested as the cause of the "Foo Fighter" reports. The second item on the list of "other weapons" was something listed as "Magnetic Wave":

"The best information available is from very secret and reliable sources and forces the conclusion that this weapon exists as a possibility. It is designed to cause failure of various electrical apparatus in aircraft. Technically it does not appear to be a possible serious threat in 1945. At most it would be effective at a few

locations for preventing ground strafing. Evidence to date indicates that it could have little effect against high level attack, since the apparatus would be too cumbersome to permit its use in aircraft."[530]

US Air Intelligence did not believe that this constituted a serious menace either. If magnetic waves sounded fantastical, then the final option on the list was definitely "out there":

"Two types of gases applicable to aircraft are known. One is designed to cause pre-ignition, blowing the heads off cylinders; and the other is designed to break down the viscosity of lubricating oils. Under laboratory conditions, free from operational considerations, these gases are a distinct possibility. It is doubtful, however, that with proper fighter escorts a sufficient concentration of either of these gases could be thrown against our formations to have any serious effect. Similarly, it is doubted whether sufficient anti-aircraft guns are available to produce an effective concentration, and it is probably that any possible concentration would be no more effective than a similar amount of well-directed flak."[531]

The employment of dangerous gases was also consigned to the "no real menace" category, despite the previous report from October 1944 involving the four P-47s. Whilst this may seem out of place in a book about the "Foo Fighters", gases capable of knocking down bombers was an integral part of alleged German secret weapons that one author claimed was a probable explanation for the reports from American night-fighter units in late 1944.

Misidentification of enemy aircraft was a common practice during the war and especially in the heat of battle. However, the shape of a Me 163 was quite striking, more so in daylight, and the white rocket exhaust plume could be seen for miles. How then did an American bomber crew report seeing a *Komet* over Zwolle, Holland, on 14th February 1945?[532] This was nowhere near the type's base near Leipzig and therefore would have been impossible to have operated hundreds of kilometres away. What were these airmen actually

seeing? A second one was reported over Plauen on the same day, but that was only around 70km from Brandis and therefore more likely to have been one of these diminutive rocket-propelled aircraft.

Although the witness did not provide exact dates and locations for his encounter, an article printed in the *Park-Ridge Herald Advocate*, Illinois on 19th January 1945 provided another example of American bomber crews seeing strange objects on missions to Germany. However, in this case, the sighting took place much nearer to their home base located in England.

"An Eighth Air Force Bomber Station, England – Second Lieutenant Edward M. Karl, 22, Park Ridge, pilot of an Eighth Air Force B-17 Flying Fortress, saw his first Nazi jet-propelled fighter on the mission attacking marshalling yards at Kassel, Germany, and still can't give much of a description of it even though it came within two yards of his plane at the time. It was his navigator, Second Lieutenant Robert M. Favor of Sweetwater, Texas, who first spotted the strange craft.

'They're firing rocket projectiles at us', he yelled over the interphone, but this didn't seem quite right for the Fortress formation was not quite across the English Channel, churning along over friendly territory toward Germany. Closer observation showed that the smoke trail behind the 'projectile' would suddenly cut off for periods, and then spurt out again, which convinced Lt. Karl that they were seeing a jet-propelled plane at a distance, for it's the habit of these craft to accumulate speed and then glide for several miles to conserve fuel. The plane disappeared and was not seen again until something leaving a trail like a comet and screaming like a runaway express train suddenly 'whooshed' past the Fort's tail going straight up; no one got a good look at it until it was a tiny dark speck miles above, trailing a cloud of white smoke. The enemy plane made no attempt to attack the bomber formation."[533]

Journalistic licence aside, there were plenty of details in this story to mull over. A small aircraft capable of high speeds and trailing white smoke was indicative of the Me 163 *Komet* rocket-propelled

interceptor. However, the fact that this encounter allegedly occurred over the Channel is interesting, as that would immediately rule out both the Me 163 and the Me 262 jet fighter. These *Luftwaffe* types did not operate anywhere near the French or Belgian coasts. The only other German jet-propelled type in operation that could have been seen in this area during the autumn of 1944 and early 1945 was the Arado Ar 234 *Blitz*, and examples that were flying in the reconnaissance role certainly carried out missions over the south coast of England at this time. However, these aircraft were unarmed and would not have flown near American daylight bomber formations. They were fast, but their pilots would never have gone close to a combat box of B-17s and its escorting fighters. Although the latter were slightly slower than an Arado, P-51 Mustang pilots could, if lucky, get themselves into a good enough firing position to wreck any chances of a successful mission. Karl's account appears to suggest some sort of *flak* rocket was employed here, although it is difficult to understand which type could have been responsible for the sighting over the English Channel listed in the newspaper article.

A further undated sighting comes courtesy of the *Nashville Tennessean* magazine in 1966. An article by Max York, entitled *"Joe Thompson and the Foo-Fighters"* gave details of an encounter with a group of strange objects over the Rhein sometime during early 1945:

"It wasn't until 1947, when the stories about flying saucers hit page one, that Nashville's Joe Thompson Jr. gave much thought to those strange objects he saw in World War II. Now an insurance man, Thompson was a photo reconnaissance pilot in the war. He and his wing man were on a mission over the Rhine Valley, photographing German troop movements, when he saw them.

'We had made some pictures, and I was looked ahead to our next photo target', Thompson recalls, 'when my wingman broke radio silence and said, 'Bogeys at 9 o'clock!'

Off my wing, a little below us, in the direction of Cologne, I saw four or five objects that looked like silvery footballs,' he says. 'They didn't seem to be moving, but they must have been, for they even stayed with us. It flashed through my mind that they were something

the Germans had put up there. I watched to see what they would do, but they didn't do anything. As we turned away, I thought they must not be of much value to the Germans. That's the last I saw of them. I turned my attention to the next photo target, where the Germans were already sending up flak to let us know they were waiting for us.'

It wasn't until later that Thompson learned that captured intelligence reports said the Germans had seen the objects, too – and thought they were put up there by the Americans!"[534]

Major Joseph Thompson flew a photo-recce version of the P-51D Mustang fighter with the 109th Reconnaissance Sqdn, commanding a group of 45 pilots based at Gosselies in Belgium. From there, they ranged out over a wide swathe of enemy territory, sometimes occasionally shooting up a few targets of opportunity in addition to taking photographs. Thompson knew that some of his pilots had seen strange objects prior to this event too:

"'When the weather was too bad for flying, I'd go around and talk with the pilots, asking them about the things they had seen on their missions,' Thompson recalls. 'Ever so often, someone would say he had seen some of those Foo-Fighters."

One of his reconnaissance pilots, listed incorrectly as Capt. Robinson, from California, thought they resembled a "smashed beer can".[535] Others believed that they looked like tennis balls or footballs, *"only much larger".* Capt. Frank Robison had his own nickname for the strange objects: "Kraut balls". Major Thompson reported his sighting to the 109th's intelligence officer after returning to base, but let the matter drop since whatever the objects were, they did not seem to interfere with his unit's mission:

"The Foo-Fighters just didn't seem important. What was important was to complete your mission and stay alive, with so many people on the ground and in the air dedicated to your destruction." [536]

Another airman with an identical surname, Floyd Thompson, a friend of researcher Raymond E. Fowler, recounted how he had witnessed an odd-looking object that followed his unit in Italy during WW2. Fowler included the story in his 1974 book, *UFOs: Interplanetary Visitors*:

"He told me that his squadron was trailed by a whitish oval object during a bombing run over Italy. Floyd said that he had seen it following their formation and watched it hover as the squadron circled while waiting for a break in the clouds before making their bombing run."

Thompson told Fowler that after the attack, the object was still visible, and appeared to be observing their formations as he and his colleagues flew back to base. No-one wanted to admit to seeing it until the debrief session, when one of the pilots finally spoke up. This prompted some of the others to confirm the object had been spotted. [537] Raymond Fowler also reported that he had talked to an airline pilot, who had piloted bombers on raids over Germany during WW2. According to this witness, the American aircraft had encountered *"formations of hovering aluminium-colored balls"* on numerous occasions. Crews believed they were simply German secret weapons although none appeared to demonstrate hostile intent.

Michel Bougard's *La Chronique des OVNI* catalogues a sighting in March 1945, experienced by the pilot of a twin-engined North American B-25 Mitchell bomber on his 37th mission. He was flying over the Brenner Pass, located between Austria and Italy, when he saw what was described as a "Foo Fighter". The strange object arrived "like a shooting star" and came to rest just three feet from the starboard wing of the aircraft. Reported as being about the size of a basketball and brilliant white in colour, the object then carried out a now classic manoeuvre in terms of these reports:

"The UFO accompanied the bomber for two or three minutes; then, suddenly, left as it had come, dashing at full speed in the sky."

According to Bougard, the pilot was shot down over the Brenner on his next mission and perished, along with his crew.[538] No further information was given about this case, and I have not been able to find any other details about the unit or the pilot who reported this incident. Without these details, this case only serves as an interesting yet unverifiable tale. It is however likely that if this encounter is true, then the B-25 belonged to the 57th Bomb Wing, which had three groups of four squadrons equipped with Mitchell bombers. However, the pilot was apparently interviewed at some stage by Bernard O'Connor, former editor of *Official UFO Magazine*. He had been the only survivor from his crew when his aircraft had been shot down but was taken prisoner by the Germans. He had only heard about the "Foo Fighter" phenomenon once he returned to the States but elected to keep quiet about his sighting due to the reception other pilots received when they talked about their own encounters.[539]

Even as late as March 1945, when the reports of strange "rockets" had practically dropped to zero, the Americans were still desperately trying to solve the mystery of these supposed German *flak* weapons. The following memo was sent to the Assistant Chief of Staff, SHAEF, on 20th March:

"1. Request additional information on V-weapons used for anti-aircraft defense, mentioned in ARGUS No.115 of 9 March 1945.
2. Any available information on means of control of flight and detonation of such projectiles is urgently required."[540]

The reply, written by Captain J. R. Whale of the Technical Intelligence Section on behalf of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, was as follows*:*

"A fair source reports the following information: V-weapons have become especially significant for anti-aircraft defence. At present there are large concentrations of this new type of flak in the Hartz

and in Thuringia, as well as along the important line Erfurt-Weissenfels-Halle-Leipzig, which the 'Oberkommando der Wehrmacht' believes Allied air forces are going to attack heavily. OKW is counting on defence by rockets (which reach 15,000 metres) to succeed in preventing enemy attacks or in making the enemy's losses unbearable. Direct hits are not required in these new types, as the blast ('Saugwirkung') is sufficient for destroying aircraft."[541]

The *Argus* document referred to was dated 21st January 1945. This was of course prior to the moratorium placed on further German *flak* rocket research and development at the end of that month. The memo was sent out even though it had been stressed at least a week earlier that the Nazi V-weapons had nothing to do with "rocket *flak*".[542]

The final case involving American daylight bombers in Europe appears to have occurred over the North Sea on the morning of 7th April 1945. Captain Louis Sewell, the navigator of a B-17 Flying Fortress, watched as what he believed to be a *Luftwaffe* fighter aircraft dive towards his crew's aircraft, only to level off and roll into a second dive, which positioned it under their bomber. He and his crewmates watched as the suspected enemy machine did not attack them. Now it was much closer, they could see it was not a conventional aircraft at all. Sewell described the strange object as looking like a V-2 rocket, although given the manoeuvres it was performing around the B-17, it would have been impossible for a missile to carry them out. As if this was not strange enough, the mysterious machine suddenly came to a dead stop in mid-air. Sewell and the rest of his crew then watched as it then tore off into the distance at incredible speed.

What was significant about this case was that numerous crews in Sewell's unit had apparently witnessed the whole encounter. In addition, the radio operator onboard his aircraft had managed to take several photos of the object. Back at base, each crew who had seen the "V-2" gave reports of their sightings to intelligence officers. The film taken by the radio operator was taken away for developing, but

Sewell and his crew were never told what appeared on any of the photographs.[543] No information regarding the object was given in subsequent intelligence briefings either. The whole episode appeared to be “hushed up”.

I have not been able to work out which particular unit Captain Sewell served with. However, there was a raid on Hamburg on 7th April 1945 and therefore the route any American bombers would have taken from their bases in East Anglia would in all likelihood have taken them over the North Sea before reaching the target. This was also the date of the planned “mass ramming attack” by *Sonderkommando Elbe*, where around 200 fighters tried in vain to ram as many USAAF B-17s as possible. Just over 20 bombers were actually brought down, although the *Luftwaffe* lost 77 pilots and over one hundred aircraft in the ensuing engagement.[544]

Although not American, the Brazilian Expeditionary Force fought in Italy alongside their US allies in late 1944 and early 1945. Among their forces deployed to the Mediterranean was 1° Grupo de Aviação de Caça (1st GAvCa, or “1st Fighter Aviation Group”, a Força Aérea Brasileira (Brazilian Air Force) unit flying American-supplied P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers. Among the pilots serving with 1st GAvCa was Captain Fortunato Cãmara de Oliveira. He was a very experienced pilot and shot down a *Luftwaffe* aircraft on his very first mission in Italy. Interviewed about his experiences during the war, the former pilot mentioned seeing “Foo Fighters”:

“I must confess, I saw a lot of weird things over there. Yes, we saw what the Allies called Foo-Fighters on a few occasions. And even today, those sightings left an impression on my mind.”

Apart from strange-looking “spirals of smoke” and something that looked like an ancient 14-bis Boxkite emanating from a *flak* burst, de Oliveira described his encounters more generally, without much detail:

"After this case [the "Boxkite"], I saw other bright things and Foo-Fighters that sometimes chased our fighters, but as the Americans thought, I wanted to mess with the intelligence personnel. I decided to stop reporting such apparitions."[545]

The American daylight experience in terms of strange encounters could be best summed up as a bewildering array of odd-looking objects, few of which resembled the "Foo Fighters" in the traditional sense but have been of interest to researchers for years. It is likely that some of the sightings involved experimental *Luftwaffe flak* shells or other as yet unknown secret weapons, but this does not explain the "rockets" that were recorded reaching higher altitudes than any of the known German devices that could have been employed at that time. Some of the objects, such as the "clouds of discs" and "swarms of bees" almost defy rational description, never mind explanations of their possible use.

Due to the narrative established by Jo Chamberlin's *American Legion* article back in December 1945, the "Foo Fighters" were only associated with sightings made by the USAAF's night-fighter units based in Belgium and France starting in November 1944. This myth was then perpetuated by authors until the mid-1990s and has therefore entered the commonly-held narrative. We will now look at the American night-time sightings in depth, although these start well before the date provided by Chamberlin too.

Chapter 6:

Advent of the “Foo Fighters”: American Nocturnal Sightings in Europe

We have encountered a phenomenon which we cannot explain…

> - Secret memo from XII Tactical Air Command to First Tactical Air Force, 16th January 1945.

Read the handful of books that detail the sightings reported by American night-fighter crews operating over Europe in the last six or seven months of the war, and one would be forgiven for thinking that the “Foo Fighter” encounters began towards the end of November 1944 when the phrase was invented. Delving deeper into the official case files and unit histories, a different picture emerges, one that includes nocturnal sightings occurring much earlier than this “accepted” date. In fact, the first case that happened was over a year earlier, in the summer of 1943 to be exact.

1943

The files held by the National Investigating Committee on Aerial Phenomenon (NICAP) include details of a rather intriguing case from the summer of 1943 that took place over the North Atlantic. The date and a more exact location are not confirmed, but the crew of a Consolidated PB2Y-5 Coronado flying boat witnessed a strange light over the ocean. Although not stated, given the type of aircraft involved, it is likely that the crew were part of the US Naval Air Transport Service’s Atlantic Wing, conducting a trans-Atlantic ferry flight as their destination was the United Kingdom. At around midnight, whilst cruising at an altitude of 10,000 feet at night and maintaining an airspeed of about 200 mph, the pilot, Lieutenant Commander James Greider, suddenly noticed a light *“flying*

formation" with his Coronado, about 300 feet off his wingtip. Although he stated that *"depth perception is difficult on a single lighted source"*, Greider estimated that the light measured anywhere between 30 and 100 feet in diameter.

The light, described as *"a big orange or red-orange ball of fire"*, *"fuzzy at the outer edge of light, like a glowing coal"*, was witnessed by Lt. Cdr. Greider, plus the seven other members of his crew. Its shape was completely circular. Not knowing what the light was, or whether it would prove hostile to his large, lumbering flying boat, the pilot attempted to shake off the mysterious device by carrying out several turns, all of which proved futile. It simply followed him through each manoeuvre, maintaining station in the same position off his wingtip. After a short period of time, no longer than three minutes or so, the strange object moved away from the Coronado and disappeared out of sight within 20 seconds. Greider decided not to file an official report with his superiors as such sightings were apparently commonplace among the trans-Atlantic ferry crews and were even a regular topic brought up in conversation in air base mess halls.[546] It would appear that the case is not listed at all outside of the NICAP files.

1944

The mid-Atlantic was the scene of another night-time sighting, although this time much further south. Kent Courtney may be known to students of American politics as someone who was part of the "Radical Right" from the 1950s to the 1970s. He ran for governor in Louisiana in 1960 but lost by a heavy margin and founded the "Conservative Society of America" the following year. What is less well known is that Courtney was a US Navy transport pilot during the war and was engaged in flying supplies and personnel across the South Atlantic on from Brazil to West Africa. He had also been a pilot with Pan Am after the war.[547] In April 1980, details of his wartime UFO sighting appeared in his local newspaper, *The Town Talk* of Alexandria, Louisiana. It is not known which of the US Navy patrol or

transport squadron Courtney served with, or which type of aircraft he was flying at the time of the encounter. The exact date of his encounter over the South Atlantic is also unknown.

"Courtney spotted a UFO while he was piloting a transatlantic flight from Brazil to Africa during WWII. 'I had no interest in UFOs until a couple of them came and flew alongside of us,' Courtney explained."

The article went onto state how the former pilot and would-be politician had become an art gallery owner but had become an avid researcher of information relating to UFOs. During the 1960s he was a radio announcer and had included reports of flying saucers as a regular part of his broadcasts.

"Courtney's sighting occurred in 1944 while he was flying a transport plane over the South Atlantic at about 10,000 feet altitude. It was a night flight. 'We were scheduled to arrive in Africa at dawn,' Courtney recalled. 'It was dark, but the four cockpit pilots could see the horizon in the distance. Then this bright pair of lights showed up in front of us. These lights were too far to be the lights of an airplane,' he said. The lights sped rapidly towards the plane's nose but separated and went around just before they reached his aircraft. 'We were aghast and all of a sudden they were coming up from behind,' Courtney said. 'They flew alongside us for four or five minutes. They were within a city block of us.' He said he didn't see a detailed craft but saw bright yellowish lights from some type of craft. When the plane touched down in Africa, Courtney and the other pilots reported the sighting. 'We were advised by the Army and Air Force to keep it to ourselves,' Courtney noted. 'The official view of the Air Force was to quell the investigation, to stop it cold.'"[548]

It always strikes me as odd that investigators from years ago did not try to dig deeper into these stories, when there was still the possibility that former crewmen were still alive and possibly willing to talk. Journalists were happy to print the stories but did not have the

inclination to dig deeper, or push for details of units, aircraft types and the dates involved.

American night-fighter crews were accustomed to chasing after ghosts. Pursuits of fleeting radar contacts picked up by Ground Control Intercept (GCI) stations frequently ran the risk of failure, with "bogeys" fading from their plots before the Bristol Beaufighters, de Havilland Mosquitoes and Northrop P-61 Black Widows operated by the Americans could catch up with them. [549] However, in the case of the "Foo Fighter" reports, radar could not even pick up the mysterious lights that the crews encountered in the skies over Occupied Europe. During some of these incidents, the same lights even chased after the night-fighters, turning hunter into prey. This would have frightened even the most experienced night-fighter pilot.

Occasionally, the ground stations tried to vector crews onto some very strange-sounding targets. One example features in Lt. Paul Iribe's Sortie Report for the night of 24/25th April 1944. Iribe and his radar observer, F/O Kiml, members of the 416th Night Fighter Squadron, had taken off from Pomigliano airfield in Beaufighter ND259 at 2315 hours for a patrol of the Castel Volturno area. After a somewhat fruitless night chasing three separate contacts passed to them by "Hedger" and "Wallsice", the local CGI stations, they were about to return to base at around 0200 when "Atom" radioed the crew to say there was *"something orbiting Castel Volturno at 120 [mph] ASI [airspeed indicated]. Could not get a contact, perhaps a loose balloon."*[550] Balloons do not usually "orbit" locations at 120 mph, so what was the radar station picking up? It would have been near stalling speed for a heavy bomber, but a Junkers Ju 87 *Stuka* dive-bomber, re-assigned to the night-attack role on the Italian front, may have been responsible. However, F/O Kiml's radar set should have picked up any *Luftwaffe* aircraft within range, and it is worth bearing in mind that this area was the scene of the RAF's Sqn Ldr Wells' *"dogfight with the Light"* just five months earlier. Nothing was found over Castel Volturno by Iribe or Kiml.

A crew from the 414th NFS found themselves playing "cat and mouse" with a suspected enemy aircraft in the early hours of 8th July

1944. Only a month or so in post, the unit's Commanding Officer, Major Carroll H. Bolender, together with his radar observer, Lieutenant Irving Wohl, had taken off from Alghero airfield in Sardinia in their Beaufighter for a patrol between Cagliari, the island's capital, and Ajaccio in neighbouring Corsica. The unit historian entered the details of their mission in the 414th NFS's July 1944 War Diary:

"At 2345 hours [on the 7th] they were vectored onto a hostile, told to increase speed, vectored again, and told to go to the deck [sea level]. The control plot faded. At 0005 they were vectored again, told to increase speed, and climb to 20,000 ft. The controller then gave them another vector and told them that they were five miles from the bandit at 19,000 ft. The plot faded, and when it reappeared, the Beau was ten miles from the bandit at 20,000 ft. Like so many other plots, this one proved a final disappointment: it faded and did not appear again. No contact was made."

Being ordered to chase targets that disappeared as soon as their night-fighters closed appeared to be a regular event for the crews of the 414th NFS at that time.[551] In addition to being both frustrating and exhausting for aircrew and ground radar staff alike, it also demonstrated the inadequacies of the equipment being used at the time. Or there was something else going on in the skies over Europe?

Lt. Frank E. Killian and F/O Henry from the 414th NFS were patrolling between Marseilles and Lyon on the night of 14th July 1944 at 2320 hours when they saw *"rockets firing five miles NE of Lyon."* No further details were provided in the report.[552] On the following evening, in the same area, Lt. Gamble and Lt. Owen noticed *"lights in the form of a flare path [aerodrome approach lights] but considerably brighter, were flashed on and off intermittently. Investigation showed no other activity."*[553] Lt. Prescott and F/O Danforth encountered lights in the vicinity of Arles, southern France, in the early hours of 7th August 1944. Pouncing on a *Luftwaffe* aircraft that had flown between them and a German searchlight

beam, silhouetting it against the light, the crew suddenly noticed two white lights behind and above them, about half a mile away. Thinking it was another enemy aircraft, possibly a night-fighter, Prescott dove for the ground and headed for the Nimes area at 100 feet.[554]

Information about the likelihood of German jets imminently entering the fray was contained in the 63rd Fighter Wing Daily Intelligence Summary dated 13th August 1944. It quoted *Jet Propelled A/C Strategic Air Force INTOPS Summary No.382* which provided the following information:

"Outstanding in the photo reconnaissance of 6 August was a concentration of jet propelled fighters at Lechfeld. There were 27 Me 262s and 5 Me 163s. Present, the largest number of jet propelled a/c yet photographed on one field."[555]

Lechfeld, situated close to the Messerschmitt factory airfield at Augsburg, was used as a testing site for the company's aircraft – and especially the new jets in the summer of 1944. The American night-fighter units in Italy and western Europe were expecting to see them at some stage. It was not long before they began reporting encounters with German jet fighters and rocket-powered interceptors. However, their sightings involved aircraft that simply could not have been seen in the locations and on the dates and times they were witnessed. Meanwhile, more lights were seen. The 63rd FW intelligence summary for 22nd August mentioned that the crew of a 416 NFS Beaufighter had seen yellow lights, possibly two aircraft, in the vicinity of Ghedi. When they got closer, the lights were extinguished, and no actual contact was made with the suspected enemy machines.[556]

The unit historian for the 422nd NFS wrote of an encounter with a "jet job" during the first week of October 1944:

"It was about this time that we saw our first Jet Jobs, [Lt. Robert O.] Elmore and [Lt. Leonard F.] Mapes having a brush with one which, in spite of all the poop [information] about its poor turning qualities,

managed to position itself on our tail just as we dove into a cloud. It was close enough for Mapes to identify as a Me 163 and he was still sucking wind 24 hours later."[557]

At that time, the unidentified lights were often being described as "jets", the crews having no other frame of reference with which to call the balls of light that followed them. They had received briefings which described the poor turning ability of the new German jet and rocket-propelled machines, but this "Me 163" had easily latched onto their tail.[558] Lt. Mapes had in fact been scared witless by the encounter. The radio operator confided in one of his squadron buddies, Lt. John Anderson, telling him about the "jet" that had tracked them:

"He was terrified (…) as white as a ghost. Something up there sure scared the hell of out him, he was nearly frantic when he got out of his aircraft."

Although the unit historian had called it a "Me 163", Anderson later recalled that Mapes described the "jet" as a "ball of light", one which followed their P-61 through a series of violent evasive manoeuvres. Elmore had not been able to shake it until he finally flew his Black Widow into a bank of cloud. It was merely the first of many encounters that the 422nd NFS would have with these mystery "jets". However, in the interests of completeness, we should look at why the Me 163 rocket-powered interceptor could not have been responsible for sightings such as this one.

Luftwaffe Me 163 *Komets* would be reported by RAF bomber crews during night-time raids over the winter and early spring of 1945. Some of the above even filed claims stating they had shot one or more down. Whilst these reports included details similar to those provided by Elmore and Mapes, it is difficult to reconcile them with known Me 163 operations. The only *Komet* unit in October 1944, the 1st *Gruppe* of *Jagdgeschwader* 400 (I./JG 400), was based at Brandis airfield, situated to the east of Leipzig. Although the

Germans planned to detach individual *Staffeln* to locations around the country, in reality the entire force of *Komet* interceptors was operated from a single base. In October 1944, I./JG 400 only comprised a *Stabschwarm* ("staff flight") and two *Staffeln*, 1./JG 400 and 2./JG 400, so it was still at least one squadron's strength short of a normal *Gruppe*. They were based at Brandis to defend the *Leunawerke* synthetic oil plant located south-west of Leipzig, a vital resource for the German war effort that was suffering from an acute lack of fuel for tanks and aircraft. Apart from an initial few weeks at Venlo in Holland after its creation in July 1944, I./JG 400 remained at Brandis until April 1945 when it was officially disbanded. It had around sixty *Komets* on establishment in December 1944.[559]

II./JG 400 was formed in November 1944 at Stargard, near Szczecin in Poland, with a staff flight and two *Staffeln*, presumably to protect the BMW rocket motor factory that was located in the town, as its products were earmarked for the new Ruhrstahl X-4 air-to-air missile.[560] A month later the unit moved to Brandis as the plan of locating detachments around the country could not be implemented due to logistical problems. It is not clear whether any missions were flown from Stargard. III./JG 400 does not appear to have been officially established, although JG 400's original *Ergänzungsstaffel* ("training and replacement squadron") was expanded into a staff flight and two squadrons by the assignment of some 400 student pilots in November 1944. It is regarding by many as the unit's III. *Gruppe*. This too was based at Brandis. However, for the purposes of this book, two points are clear. *Komets* were based too far away from the Rhein Valley to have been able to operate there, as the type had a limited endurance and was limited to a reasonably small circle of airspace centred on Leipzig. Secondly, the type never flew at night. Whatever Elmore and Mapes had encountered that night in October 1944, it was not a Me 163.

However, the 422nd NFS was encountering not just single, but multiple Me 163s if the daily operations report for the evening of 9th October submitted to Ninth Air Force Command was anything to go by:

"At 2045, 4 separate jet flames [were] sighted flying on a course 300 degrees, 15,000 feet. Believed to be four Me 163s flying in formation. Contact lost due to clouds, haze."[561]

This particular sighting took place within a triangle of land between Aachen, Liege and Malmedy. V-1 flying bombs flying on a course of 300° in this location would have been aimed at the Antwerp or Brussels areas, and therefore could have been an explanation, but 15,000 feet was simply too high for their normal cruising altitude. Whilst these unknown machines were recorded as Me 163s in the daily operations report, no doubt due to a lack of firm details regarding the rocket-powered aircraft's limitations, the possibility these were *Komets* can be completely ruled out. The question of just what the machines were is open to debate – were they even aircraft?

At around the same time, two Lockheed P-38 Lightings belonging to the 474th Fighter Group were patrolling near Duren between 1725 and 1845 hours as part of efforts to defend the American First Army against *Luftwaffe* intruder attacks. The pilots saw what was believed to be a jet flying at 3,000 feet on a course that would take it in the direction of Liege in Belgium. Giving chase, the P-38s reached 450 mph in the dive towards the target, but despite overhauling it slightly, once they levelled out, they found they could not catch up with the suspected enemy "jet" and the chase was soon abandoned. Although the operating altitude and direction fitted the profile of a V-1 flying bomb, whatever the American fighter pilots were attempting to intercept was travelling faster than a "doodlebug".[562] The abortive pursuit occurred at dusk, and the profile fitted an Arado Ar 234 *Blitz* jet reconnaissance aircraft, although these did not operate at night. Whatever it was, the mysterious "jet" was flying away from Germany so would have been on the outbound part of its sortie if it had been an enemy machine. A jet returning home at dusk would have been an acceptable explanation. This should have ruled out the possibility of any *Luftwaffe* jet missions, although the Americans were not

aware of the limitations that the German pilots were operating under at the time.

The daily operations report that was sent by the 422nd NFS to Ninth Air Force Command for the night of 14/15th October 1944 included a very strange set of sightings made over enemy territory:

"0200 Cologne, 15 orange red lights or fires became visible almost symmetrically around city outskirts, turned on 0200. Two different pilots observed same thing, 0130 Munchen-Gladbach visible some sort of lights, orange red in some manner with 10 lights. No lights in center & all lights turned on at same time. Row of lights parallel, coded and blinking 'at' the course of the fighter & also seen to indicate approach of bombers in same manner at 0130 hours Munchen-Gladbach area."

If that was not enough, after strafing a suspected railway marshalling yard in the vicinity of Solingen, the pilot responsible for that attack reported the following information:

"Large areas mostly boomerang shape, roughly five miles long & half mile wide, 10 to 12 such areas in Solingen area. Thousands of diffused lights seen in each area giving appearance of light shining through square holes. (…) observer reported seeing balloons on scope. After a large explosion, all lights in air as if controlled by a central switch."[563]

The reaction of the recipients at Ninth Air Force Command is not known. However, it seems that no-one had any idea what was being referred to in either of the above reports. Lost among the strangeness was another reference to a suspected "jet", which was chased across western Germany until the P-61 had to abandon the pursuit due to lack of fuel.[564] However, the *Luftwaffe* were not operating jets at night at that time, so it is difficult to work out what the American night-fighter crew were trying to catch.

Lt. Ryan and Lt. Wohl, serving with the 414th Night Fighter Squadron, 62nd Fighter Wing, took off from Pisa, Italy, in a Bristol Beaufighter Mk.VIF on a combined Nickelling and intruder mission over the Po Valley area on the evening of 20th October 1944. According to the unit's records, they dropped 40,000 leaflets west of the city and then strafed a convoy of trucks on the opposite side of Bologna, damaging some vehicles. Whilst airborne, the crew observed a "red light" that looked like a navigation light fitted to an aircraft, but as they drew closer, it disappeared and no contact was made.[565] During the previous two months, several 414th NFS crews had been vectored onto contacts that disappeared as they grew closer. This of course could have been due to enemy aircraft descending below radar coverage, flying behind hills or simply quirks of the early radar systems. On the same night, the crew of a 416th NFS Beaufighter patrolling near Florence noticed two orange balls that were seen *"to dive into the hills".* The pilot could not get close enough to identify what the lights were.[566] An unusual sighting was recorded by another 422nd NFS crew over western Germany on the same evening:

"2310 hours, observed greenish light in a 45° dive about 15 miles east of Juelich, *resembled the glow of the V-1 flying bomb, only green in color, steady trail, travelling west at 12,000 feet very fast."*

It was extremely unlikely to have been a V-1 flying bomb as it was at too high an altitude. They flew at only a quarter of that height. It was not the only strange entry to end up in that night's operation report, however, as another crew *"saw 5 Me 163s, took evasive action climbing and diving".* Two of the "*Komets"* that were reported were observed just *"east side of A-78"*, which was the American designation for the 422nd's airfield at Florennes in Belgium at that time.[567] Whatever these mysterious contacts were, they were getting a little too close to home for the night-fighter crews.

Lt. Elmore and Lt. Mapes had taken off from Florennes at 1819 hours in P-61A-5 42-5534 *Shoo-Shoo Baby* on the same evening for

their patrol line east of Aachen. According to the daily operations report, *"a visual was made on a Me 163, but it climbed too rapidly for an engagement."*[568] It is not recorded how Mapes felt about seeing another one of these "jets", given his reaction to their first encounter a couple of weeks earlier. The crew returned to base at 2041 hours. Rocket-powered Me 163 *Komets* were based nowhere near Florennes or even Aachen, and they did not fly at night in any case, so what did Elmore and Mapes actually see? Another high-performance target was noted in the early hours of the 26th, when the 422nd NFS crew flying "Mission Y21-10" encountered the following:

"1 jet prop a/c, 50 miles E of base, climbing from 15,000 to 20,000 ft & generally heading west, at 0115."[569]

Yet again, the night-fighter crews were reporting jet-propelled aircraft that simply could not have been there. What were they seeing?

The evening of 28th October 1944 brought no reduction in the scale of the "jet" reports being filed by the crews from the 422nd NFS. During the late afternoon, the RAF had bombed Köln and by the time the first American Black Widow crews arrived at their patrol lines on the eastern bank of the Rhein, they saw the city covered by *"a mass of fires and smoke up to 11,000 feet."* However, the devastation wrought on Köln was not the only thing mentioned in their reports. 42-5544 *Lady Gen*, with Lt. Paul Smith at the controls and Lt. Robert Tierney as his radar observer, took off from Florennes at 1723 hours. Their post-mission report was as follows:

"South of Koln at 1815 hours, one jet observed at 15,000 feet flying due north. Propulsion units on for 2 mins. West of Koln, 2 jets in formation at 10,000 feet travelling north at 1805. Propulsion units on for 2 mins."[570]

The lines about "propulsion units" being on for specific periods of time is interesting. It would appear that Smith and Tierney had not

actually witnessed the “jet” aircraft themselves, but had only seen sets of “flames” that appeared for two minute-long periods before vanishing. P-61A-5 42-5567 *Moonlight Wreck* departed Florennes at 1855 bound for a patrol area situated between Aachen and Köln. The crew reported the following:

“A single jet or rocket was observed climbing and levelling to 25,000 ft, climbed from 5,000 to 25,000 ft when lost sight near Duren at 2040.”

Finally, 42-5564 *Junkin’ Judy* was *“chased by a jet at 0320 while returning to base.”*[571] The number of sightings were increasing but none of the suspected enemy “jets” appeared to threaten any of the American crews.

The same evening involved more strange nocturnal sightings involving masses of lights. Another machine from the 422nd NFS, 42-5540 *Katy the Kid*, was airborne from Florennes and patrolling the Bonn-Köln area after dark. According to the daily operations report, the crew of the P-61A Black Widow, believed to have been Captain Tadas J. Spelis and Lt. Elutherios Eleftherion, saw strange groups of lights in the distance:

“Rectangular patterns of green lights. There were hundreds of green lights in group with no definite uniformity. Rocket observed climbing at 2040 and then climbed out of sight.”

There was no explanation for these huge groups of green lights, just as there had not been for the “thousands” of lights that were noted earlier that month. Two separate crews had witnessed the “rocket”, which could have been explained by a V-2 rocket being launched, although it would not have “levelled off” at around 25,000 feet unless it was experiencing problems.

It was not the last mention of strange phenomena in the report for that evening, either. The crew of 42-5573 *Lovely Lady* chased a target from the Aachen area *“all the way to the French coast”* without

catching it or even obtaining a visual on it, although they closed to within half a mile. Whatever they were chasing that night registered on the radar observer's SCR-720 airborne intercept set. 42-5564 *Jukin' Judy*, crewed by Lt. Eugene Lee and his radar observer, Lt. Donald Doyle, found themselves on the other end of a pursuit. Whilst returning to Florennes, Ground Control Intercept radar informed Lee that he was being *"chased by a jet".* This occurred at 0320 on the morning of the 29th, when the P-61 was only 40 miles away from landing. The mysterious contact was never identified, although the ground station must have determined its speed in order to classify it as a "jet". The final mention of a "jet" that night came from Lt. Elmore and Lt. Mapes in *Shoo-Shoo Baby*, who witnessed *"one jet seen climbing from east to west at 7,000 to 25,000 feet in vicinity of Brubel at 0545."*

The following evening, Lt. Raymond Romens and Lt. Joseph R. Morin were patrolling the Aachen area in P-61A-10 42-5594 when Ground Control vectored them to intercept what was described as a "fast target". Having closed to within three miles, Romens soon struggled to keep up with the fleeting blip that appeared on his radar observer's scope. Before a visual could be obtained, the target suddenly vanished from both the ground radar and Morin's equipment.[572] Fast moving *Luftwaffe* jets were not flying at night at this stage but was it really a "Foo Fighter" instead, as this phenomenon did not usually register on radar.

According to the August 1994 issue of *The Raven*, the newsletter of the 301st BG Association, on the same evening, 29th October 1944, 1/Lt. William A. Schultz was the pilot of 419th BS B-17 *Strictkly Business* heading from his base in Italy towards Munich.[573] He was flying what was known as a "Lone Wolf" mission, a "nuisance" raid carried out at night, one involving very small numbers of aircraft operating independently to reach their targets in southern Germany and the Balkans. The Americans did not generally fly B-17s at night. Schultz's was one of twelve B-17s selected from the 5th BW to fly the first Lone Wolf mission in the Mediterranean Theatre of

Operations. His target that night was a railway marshalling yard on the west side of the city, aiming for a drop time of 0215 hours.

Schultz took off from Foggia at 2230 hours, the B-17s departing at 15 minute intervals to maintain separation in the dark. His bomber was carrying twelve 500lb bombs, half of which had randomly delayed action fuses. The aircraft's engine exhausts were not fitted with dampeners, so the pilot hugged the safety of banks of cloud at around 26,000 feet so as to avoid the attention of *Luftwaffe* night-fighters. The onboard H2X navigation radar set (a variant of the RAF's H2S, nicknamed the "Mickey scope" by the Americans) helped the crew "see" through clouds so the navigator could still detect ground features, usually lakes or rivers without actually spotting them visually. A brief encounter with a Ju 88 night-fighter caused the pilot to descend sharply for bank of cloud below him, breaking contact. The *Luftwaffe* aircraft did not pursue.

At 0145 hours Schulz's B-17 had reached the Initial Point and turned onto the final course for the marshalling yard. His aircraft broke out of the high scattered clouds, and he was amazed to see a strange object flying alongside. No-one in the squadron could give him an explanation for the blue light that paced his aircraft that night:

"A light blue coloured ball of fire, approximately three feet in diameter, appeared about 40 feet off our right wing tip. It actually flew along with us for about 30 seconds with streams of fire trailing down, but it was too large to be a plane. To this day, I don't know what it was."

October 1944 ended up with more "jet" sightings by the 422nd NFS, although the reports of "single engined jets" cannot be reconciled with the known types operated by the *Luftwaffe* at the time. The operations report for 31st October included the following:

"4 single jet propelled aircraft sighted during the night; 1 at 1845 hours, going west 12,000 feet, 2 at 0100 hours, 1 going east 7,000 feet and 1 north at 15,000 feet, [plus] 1 going east 15,000 feet 0400

hours 10 miles west of Cologne. All sightings between Aachen and the Rhine."[574]

However, the more detailed follow-up report included more information on these sightings. Romens and Morin in 42-5594 had chased three separate "jets" but could not catch any of them. It was probably just as well, as the pilot had damaged his own aircraft when his machine-guns malfunctioned after he opened fire at a Junkers Ju 188 bomber earlier in the patrol. Their aircraft suffered a "prang" on landing due to the damage inflicted by the jammed weapons. P-61 42-5547 *Borrowed Time*, flown by Lt. Herman Ernst, had encountered two separate "jets" flying at 15,000 feet and a third about 20 miles west of Köln. There was also another "jet" seen that night, as the crew of 42-5540 *Katy the Kid* witnessed a singleton at 1845 hours, flying west at 12,000 feet.[575] The squadron's crews had therefore reported not just four, but six targets during the same night, and once again they were being seen in the area bordered by Aachen, Bonn and Köln.

Could these fleeting targets have been V-1 flying bombs? The first salvoes were being launched against Antwerp and Brussels at that time, the weapons being fitted with Argus pulse-jet engines that propelled them at around 340 mph. However, the cruising height of a V-1 flying bomb was much lower than these reports stated. They flew at about 3,500 feet, between the effective firing ranges of the Allied light and heavy anti-aircraft guns. The reports of the "jets" flying eastwards would also seem to rule out flying bombs as they would have been travelling in the wrong direction. In any case, some 422nd NFS crews had experience of chasing V-1s over the English Channel when a detachment from the squadron was based on the south coast of England in June 1944, before moving to France.[576] They had shot down five flying bombs in the summer and had seen others they had not been able to engage. The unit's personnel knew perfectly well what the V-1 looked like at night. The phenomenon was not St. Elmo's Fire either, as aircrew were familiar with that too. These lights in the sky were something completely different.

The crews would therefore have had either personal awareness of the flying bombs or had heard descriptions from their colleagues. These sightings may have involved Arado Ar 234B *Blitz* jet bombers, although few were operational at that time, and they did not fly at night.

Whilst it seems from the above reports as though the 422nd NFS was hogging all of the sightings, an official report from the 415th suggested their crews had also encountered strange lights during their patrols at the same time. A summary of the squadron's war history was written up in the immediate post-war period when the unit was based in Germany. Written by 2/Lt. Frank Prescott, an intelligence officer with the 415th NFS, it includes the following paragraph, which neatly summarised the squadron's initial encounter with the mysterious phenomenon:

"Another outstanding feature occurred late in October [1944]. While flying an intruder mission in the Rhine Valley, Capt. Edward Schlueter and Lt. Don Myers [sic] experienced contact with the first FooFighters, referred to as such by Lt. Myers for the lack of a better name and because of the eerie feeling it gave the crew. At first these officers were taunted by their buddies and began to wonder whether they had developed combat fatigue. However, other crews began to report seeing FooFighters in the Rhine Valley at night, thus the FooFighters were definitely established as an existing phenomena."[577]

No entries for any sightings appear in the unit's War Diary for October, and it is likely that Prescott attributed the reports from November 1944 to a different month. The story behind the name "Foo Fighters" was also wrong.

On the evening of 2nd November 1944, a 422nd NFS crew witnessed another "fast mover" over the area between Aachen and the Rhein. According to the daily operations report, the following occurred:

"An encounter took place with a jet-prop aircraft at about 1920 hours, altitude 10,000 feet near Bonn. Closed to estimated 1,000 yards, fired one burst, without results. Jet aircraft immediately climbed out of range."

The term "jet-prop" did not refer to what is now known as a "turboprop" aircraft. It was explained further in the Operations Report "A" sent to Ninth Air Force:

"A/c 5547, defensive patrol of the Rhine River & Cologne at Angels 15 [15,000 feet]. A jet-propelled a/c was seen at Angels 10, one burst was fired at it, but it climbed too fast and was not engaged again, nor hit by the burst."[578]

"5547" referred to Lt. Herman Ernst's aircraft, 42-5547 *Borrowed Time*, and it was his second encounter in three days with the "jets". He had fired 20 rounds of 20mm cannon shells at the target, which was not identified. By this stage, the night-fighter unit was reporting fleeting contacts with so-called "jets" almost every night they put aircraft in the air. It is important to note that this was happening nearly four weeks before the date that many UFO researchers took to be the beginning of the "Foo Fighter" sightings.
GCI radar vectored no less than five of the 422nd NFS's P-61A Black Widows towards suspected enemy "jets" on the night of 4th November 1944. Out of these five, three managed to get close enough to obtain visual sightings. Lt. Ernst, flying 42-5547 *Borrowed Time*, chased after two of them on separate occasions in the vicinity of Schmidt, located south-east of Aachen, but never managed to get near enough to engage them. It is not recorded who made the third attempted interception.[579] Mysterious, fast-moving aircraft were included in the operations summary for that night: *"Jets just SW of Bonn, 1815, 7,000 ft."*[580] Sightings of suspected "jets" by the 422nd NFS went into complete overdrive on the evening of the 5th, and the vicinity of Aachen appeared to be one of the hotspots for encounters by the unit's P-61s. The daily operations report sent to Ninth Air

Force Headquarters mentioned little else for the overnight period in question:

"Considerable jet plane activity during patrol periods, vicinity Cologne. 1 jet plane near Vogelsand at 14,000 feet at 1920 hours. 5 jet planes observed near Cologne 1830-1930 hours, but pilot was unable to close to less than 1 mile. 1 jet plane over site A-78 at 5,000 feet at 2000 hours."[581]

The last entry confirmed that something had flown very fast over the 422nd NFS's home base at Florennes-Juzaine in Belgium. No less than four P-61 crews were airborne that night, and all of them reported seeing "jets". Since these contacts could not have been *Luftwaffe* jets, the question as to which fast-moving objects were being seen at this point in the war? Not only were they easily outpacing the P-61 Black Widows, the mysterious "jets" were now flying in the vicinity of the night-fighters' own airbases, and there appeared to be nothing that the Americans could do to stop them.

Lt. Siegle and his radar observer, Lt. Bernard Orzel, were flying a defensive patrol that night in the vicinity of the airfield at Vogelsang, located in the Eifel Hills, although the aerodrome itself was not home to any German units at the time. The mission summary read as follows:

"Spotted jet flying 260° at Angels 14, when pilot tried to chase, jet put on power and climbed out of sight. Single light observed at same time. Pilot at first was passing jet, indicating 220. Throttled back and pulled to within ½ mile and beneath when jet put on power."

Although the report seems on first glance to be normal enough, it is strange that a *Luftwaffe* jet night-fighter or bomber would have been flying with a navigation light shining. 220 mph (or knots indicated airspeed) would have also been very slow for a jet which normally cruised at a much faster speed, around 455 mph (732km/h). In addition, below 280 mph, the Me 262's wing leading slats

automatically deployed in a turn or in the climb to lower the possibility of the aircraft stalling in flight. As reported here many times now, the Me 262 was not yet ready for night operations, and the small number of Ar 234 *Blitz* jet bombers that were available usually only operated in "penny packets" of two or three aircraft, but again not at night.

The sightings were still not quite finished for that particular night. Lt. Lee and Lt. Doyle were on patrol in the Bonn and Köln area in P-61A 42-5564 *Jukin' Judy* when they witnessed *"several flares, similar to jets"* in the area. Lt. Donald Snow, flying P-61A-10 42-5573 *Lovely Lady*, reported seeing "numerous jets" in the same location. Elmore and Mapes were "free-lancing" in P-61 42-5534 *Shoo-Shoo Baby* over the Bonn area when a contact was spotted. They began to pursue it but were stymied when the "jet" put on a sudden burst of speed and climbed away out of sight.[582] It is telling that none of these reports actually gave an identification of the suspected *Luftwaffe* aircraft concerned beyond the term "jet". It appears to have been a catch-all description for lights that may have been interpreted as jet exhausts, seen in the skies by the 422nd NFS crews.

The commander of the 422nd NFS, Lt. Col. Oris B. Johnson, gave reporters details of what he thought crews were facing. Associated Press ran the story under the headline *"New Aerial Weapons Used By Germans"*, and it was featured in newspapers all over America on 7th November 1944. *The Day*, of New London, Connecticut, was one of them:

"Paris (AP)—The Germans are using jet and rocket propelled planes and various other 'new-fangled' gadgets against Allied night fighters, Lieut. Col. B. Johnson, Natchitoches, La., commander of a P-61 Black Widow group, said today: 'In recent nights we've counted 15 to 20 jet planes,' Johnson said. 'They sometimes fly in formations of four, but more often they fly alone.'"[583]

Of course, with the benefit of hindsight and access to *Luftwaffe* records, it is known that the Germans were not flying jets at night at

that time – and even when they eventually started to do this, it was under specific circumstances and only in one area. What is not always included when Lt. Col. Johnson's statement is cited is that he also provided two further quotes which were published in certain versions of the AP story:

"Johnson described a new kind of flak which he said might be a phosphorous bomb. 'It exploded in a large ball of fire at 10,000 feet and I could see drops of fire dripping away from it,' he said. 'The same ball of fire exploded several times, each time at a lower altitude. The dripping process followed each explosion', he added."

Phosphorus bombs were a new suggestion. Whilst the *Luftwaffe* certainly used this as a constituent element of their small incendiary bombs, the notion of *flak* guns firing phosphorus shells was interesting, if not grounded in reality. However, if aerial phosphorus bombs were not strange enough, Lt. Col. Johnson had one more intriguing comment to make:

"The Germans also have a trick weapon which sends a dummy airplane into the paths of daylight bombers purely for a 'psychological' effect. 'It looks like the tail or other part of a plane on fire, but does no damage,' Johnson said. 'They merely intend it to get you excited.'"[584]

A "dummy airplane" was definitely something of a new development, but with hindsight it is clear that the Germans did not employ such tactics. It is therefore hard to work out just what Oris Johnson was talking about here.

The 422nd NFS appears to have had a short respite from the strange phenomena for a few days, but the sightings of "jets" resumed during the early hours of 8th November 1944. After an uneventful patrol between Schmidt and Aachen, 2/Lt. James ("Pistolshot") Postlewaite and his radar observer, F/O Chet Hawley, flying in 42-5557 *Little Linda*, *"sighted a jet E of Florennes at Angels*

15 to 20 [15,000 to 20,000 feet].*"* In addition to this sighting, Lee and Doyle were again up in 42-5564 *Jukin' Judy* and just before sun-up *"observed jet from 30 to 50 miles E of Meld, it climbed from Angels 3 to 20."*[585] This appears to have been another frustrated chase as the target was observed over a distance of 20 miles. Once again the mysterious "jets" themselves remained elusive and totally unidentified.

Three nights' worth of operations were then missed due to bad weather. It was the evening of 11th November before the 422nd NFS flew missions over the Rhein Valley again. 2 "buzz-bombs" and a "jet" were reported during the evening of the 11th, but no interceptions or engagements were carried out. The "jet" was reported to be in a vertical climb, which suggests that it may have been a sighting of a V-2 launch.[586] The following evening, Lt. Elmore and Lt. Mapes in 42-5534 *Shoo-Shoo Baby* were more confident of their identification abilities when they witnessed a *"V-2 rocket climbing at 90° to Angels 40 [40,000 feet] in the vicinity of Schleiden."*[587] This was around 30 km south-east of Aachen. There were a couple of V-2 launch sites south-east of Köln, primarily for attacks against Antwerp and Brussels, but it is unclear whether they were being used at that time. It is possible that some crews may have mistaken distant sightings of rocket launches for "Foo Fighters" on occasions, but they did not follow aircraft, and if observed at much closer ranges, it was obvious what they were. The same went for the V-1 flying bombs, and these were reported on numerous occasions as the crews were quite familiar with the intermittent exhaust flames emanating from the Argus pulse jets fitted to these weapons.

P-61 Black Widow Units of World War 2 includes details of an incident involving a 422nd NFS crew near Bonn on the evening of 15th November 1944. Although the author classed it as the first night-time visual sighting of a Me 163 *Komet*, I have doubts about the actual date listed, as the crew involved had already experienced a similar encounter the month before. According to the book, at 2300 hours on the 15th, the recently-promoted Captain Elmore and Lt.

Mapes were flying on a “freelance” intruder mission around Bonn, looking for targets of opportunity on the ground and in the air. Flying in P-61A 42-5534 *Shoo-Shoo-Baby*, they reported overcast cloud at the 4,000 foot level but the moonlit skies above were perfectly clear. Mapes suddenly picked up a “bogey” on his SCR-720 radar set, one that was high above them and flying at a terrific speed. As it was about to fly overhead their aircraft, Elmore threw the P-61 into a tight 180° turn in order to put them behind the suspected enemy machine. Unfortunately, Mapes found he could no longer track the “bogey” on radar so looked out of his aircraft to try and acquire it visually. Lt. Mapes was amazed by what he saw:

“The sight was unbelievable! It appeared to be shaped like a wedge of pie with a long plume of flame coming from its rear end.”

The “wedge of pie” was flying in a tight circle directly above the P-61. The radar operator provided continuous directions to the pilot throughout the encounter, and as Elmore finally saw it for himself, the plume of flame died down to just a glow and whatever was generating it spiralled down towards them. The pilot believed he saw cannon or machine gun fire emanating from its nose, although nothing struck the American aircraft. Elmore initiated a series of manoeuvres designed to throw off his attacker, at which point the suspected enemy aircraft broke off and entered a steep, almost vertical climb, again with a long plume of flame coming out of its rear. The P-61 crew had never managed to get into a decent firing position at any stage. They both agreed they had seen a Me 163 at night, thinking it was the first nocturnal encounter with one.[588]

Whilst Thompson’s book quotes Mapes as claiming the strange aircraft was a Me 163, and therefore the engagement was the first sighting of one at night by the unit, based on previous 422nd NFS reports this cannot be correct. In fact, looking at the official correspondence between the 442nd and Ninth Air Force, no operations were flown either that night or on the 14th, again presumably due to bad weather. Given the description of the crew’s

encounter with the “Me 163”, it is much more likely that this was an account of the crew’s undated October 1944 sighting, which does feature in the official records. The description of the long plume of flame could be attributed to a *Komet* but none of these aircraft could have been operating in the Bonn area, or at night.

The distance and location of the only Me 163 *Komet* unit are important to bear in mind when trying to determine what Elmore and Mapes saw over Bonn in November 1944. Performance figures for the rocket-powered interceptor include endurance instead of range, largely as a result of its unique nature among WW2 combat aircraft. However, using its maximum permitted speed we can estimate how just far one could fly in a straight line before its fuel ran out. Endurance was around 7½ minutes, and at a speed of 560 mph, this equates to something in the region of 70 miles. Due to the exotic and lethal nature of the two fuels the Me 163’s rocket motor used, the type was to all intents and purposes confined to Brandis, near Leipzig, located around 230 miles east of Bonn.

The *Komet* was a difficult enough aircraft to fly and land safely in the daylight, never mind at night. Closing speeds on its targets were often in excess of 500 mph and did not allow for accurate shooting by day, so night operations would have been almost impossible to perform. Furthermore, the necessary refuelling facilities simply did not exist closer to Bonn. Mano Ziegler, a former Me 163 pilot who served with both the testing unit EKdo 16 and JG 400, maintained that the type had never been flown at night. In addition, no records or pilot testimony confirms otherwise. Landing a *Komet* in the dark at 155 mph, onto a dimly lit grass strip using its inbuilt sprung skid, with the remnants of two extremely volatile fuels in the bottom of its fuel tanks, was not conducive to safe operations. One of these fuels would have spontaneously combusted if the tank had ruptured in a crash and it had spilled onto the pilot. Whatever Elmore and Mapes saw, it was almost certainly not a *Komet.* The radar operator’s description of “a wedge of pie” does not match anything in the *Luftwaffe’s* operational arsenal. However, unlike the mysterious lights that were being reported, according to his account, the “bogey”

had initially registered on the aircraft's SCR-720 airborne radar. Just what did the crew encounter?

Fast moving targets were not the only things being reported by the 422nd NFS crews during November 1944. At 2023 hours on the 17th, P-61A-10 42-5565 *Double Trouble*, flown by 1/Lt. Robert Bolinder, departed Florennes for a patrol in the Bonn area. The daily operations report states that Bolinder and his radar observer, 2/Lt. Robert Graham, carried out *"one chase on a stationery target at Angels 22* [22,000 feet]*."* This was too high for a German *Sperrballon* ("barrage balloon"), as their maximum altitude was around 18,000 feet. The rudimentary *Luftwaffe* helicopters of the time could barely reach 16,000 feet. Bolinder and Graham also reported seeing two V-1 flying bombs during their patrol.

During the early hours of the following morning, 1/Lt. Herman Ernst and 2/Lt. Edward Kopsel in 42-5547 *Borrowed Time* chased *"a target that climbed from Angels 15 to 30 in 2 min."*[589] Something climbing at 7,500 feet per minute was not going to be caught by a P-61, or indeed any other piston-engined fighters. A pilot would be lucky to get 2,400 feet per minute out of a Black Widow. Even the single-seat Me 262A jet fighter was only capable of just under 4,000 feet per minute, leaving the rocket-powered Me 163 as the sole contender for such a feat. Once again, the *Komet* was a perfect match but for the fact that it did not fly at night. It was evident that something capable of high speeds, that may also have been mistaken for jet exhausts, was flying around in the night skies of eastern Belgium and western Germany in early November 1944. "Foo Fighters" appeared to be around even before the term had been invented.

The Italian front did not produce as many odd reports during November, but one of the 414th NFS's crews managed to enter into a brief "dogfight" with what was reported as "a suspected enemy aircraft" at around 2345 hours on the 17th. All that was seen was a set of flames, which was classed as an "exhaust". No visual sighting of an actual aircraft was made at the time. Lt. Jenkins and Lt. Campbell spotted the light 25 miles north of Florence, whilst it was

approaching head-on towards their Beaufighter but around 1,500 feet higher. Jenkins attempted to try and follow it in order to intercept, but the light suddenly made two tight orbits, turning inside their own aircraft before breaking away and disappearing.[590] Whatever they had encountered did not appear on GCI radar.

422nd NFS crews were witnessing fast-moving items over the Rhein in November 1944. The operations report for the 18th made for interesting reading: *"One V-2 at 2000 hours going west, climbing vicinity of Bonn."* It was reported by the crew of P-61A 42-5557 *Little* Linda, who described the "jet flame" emanating from the rocket as being orange in colour.[591] Seeing a V-2 rocket being launched in the area of Bonn in November 1944 was not impossible. Whilst the SS-controlled artillery units responsible for firing such missiles against London, Antwerp, Brussels and Liege were mostly located in Holland, a number of rockets were launched against Antwerp from sites to the north-east of Koblenz. Another possible candidate, the Rheinmetall-Borsig *Rheinbote* ("Rhine Messenger") battlefield missile, a shorter-ranged ballistic artillery rocket fitted with a 40 kg warhead, was not ready for operations until the end of December 1944. Some 200 were fired at Antwerp between November 1944 and the end of the war, although once again its launching sites were again mostly situated in southern Holland. However, such items could not follow aircraft or make turns, nor could they fly horizontally for any appreciable length of time, so could not be responsible for the veritable flood of reports which was about to occur.

Such manoeuvres were however reported by the 422nd NFS. An even stranger item in the same report came courtesy of 1/Lt. Herman Ernst and 2/Lt. Edward Kopsel in 42-5547 *Borrowed Time*, who were on patrol in the Duren area at around 12,000 feet. They spotted two "buzz bombs", one of which was performing 30° turns whilst in flight.[592] This seemed to rule out the possibility that the machine was a flying bomb, as they flew in straight lines towards their targets. Their launching ramps had to be aligned exactly towards the intended impact areas. Disturbance of the missile would quickly lead to it going off course, and no actual guidance system

was fitted. Flying straight and level courses allowed Allied anti-aircraft gunners to destroy many of the V-1s using proximity-fused shells. The Germans never installed any kind of "jinker" in the missile, as it would have been too difficult to return it to its correct track after turning in flight.[593] A "jet" sighting was also included in the same 422nd NFS report, having been seen just west of Köln before dawn.[594]

There was simply no end to the reports of "jets" and other strange lights in the sky made by the 422nd NFS crews. Capt. Elmore and 2/Lt. Mapes were airborne from Florennes in 42-5534 *Shoo-Shoo Baby* at 1907 hours on the evening of the 19th for a defensive patrol in the Bonn, Köln and Monchengladbach areas. The crew were involved in two separate chases, the second involving either *"a navigation light or exhausts at 5,000 feet [spotted] from 9,000 feet"* but they did not have enough fuel to catch up with the target and had to break off the pursuit. Again, it is somewhat odd that *Luftwaffe* aircraft would fly with illumination showing, as this would draw attention to them. The RAF and USAAF night-fighter forces were exacting a heavy enough toll on German night operations as it was, without enemy pilots making it even easier for them. A "jet" was also reported by the crew of P-61A 42-5589, who also experienced jamming on one of their radio channels. In the early hours of the 20th, a further Black Widow crew tried but failed to intercept a *"rapidly climbing target"* that was last reported reaching 31,000 feet.[595] A single "jet" was also noted flying at 20,000 feet at 2100 hours on the same evening, but remained unidentified.[596] Once again, *Luftwaffe* "jets" were being reported by the 422nd NFS crews when such aircraft could not possibly have been operating at night.

At around 2100 hours on the 21st, between four and six suspected jets, including one described as a "twin jet", were spotted in the vicinity of Koblenz. At one point, a number of these adopted a strange formation, as *"three seen at one time, line abreast."*[597] At the time, only one German pilot had any experience flying at night in the Me 262, so flying three, four or six of these aircraft would have been beyond the enemy's capabilities. On the night of the 26th, a

"jet" was observed in the area of Euskirchen.[598] The rate of sightings did not let up, as on the following evening, several crews from the 12 P-61s dispatched by the 422nd NFS on defensive patrols encountered what they believed were jets although again no identification was made. Presumably due to a lack of information, the unit's operations summary simply refers to *"three jet planes active in Cologne-Bonn area, 2330-0330."*[599] No combat was entered into by the P-61s as the crews were unable to catch up with the alleged "jets".

In March 1958, William Leet wrote to Donald Keyhoe (at that time the Director of NICAP) concerning three strange encounters that he had experienced since 1944. He described himself as a "crusader for truth" and informed Keyhoe he was happy to offer his services. Leet provided a summary of his November 1944 sighting in the letter, plus details of further incidents in October 1952 in Japan, and in California whilst he was based at McClellan AFB:

"Long before your book, 'Flying Saucers Are Real' was published, my B-17 and my crew and I were followed by a 'foo fighter', a small amber disc, all the way from Klagenfurt, Austria to the Adriatic Sea. This occurred on a 'lone wolf' mission at night, as I recall, in December 1944 in the 15th Air Force, 5th Wing, 2nd Bomb Group. The intelligence officer who debriefed us stated that it was a new German fighter but could not explain why it did not fire at us or, if it was reporting our heading, altitude and airspeed, why we did not receive anti-aircraft fire."

Leet also provided MUFON with an account of his sighting, published as *"The Flying Fortress and the Foo Fighter"* in their *UFO Journal*:

"Heading back towards Trieste, all at once there appeared just off our left wing a round amber light. None of us saw it approach or had any sight of it until it was right beside the B-17, flying along in formation with us. The object's outline was a perfect circle – too

perfect; its color was a luminous orange-yellow, too luminous. We could only guesstimate its distance and size. To me, it looked to be about 50 yards out from the wingtip, 10 yards to the rear and 10 feet in diameter. Was it 100 yards distant and 20 feet in diameter? I was aware of a fascination while observing it. The gunners wanted to shoot whatever-it-was with their fifty-calibres [0.5-inch machine-guns] but I ordered them not to – if the thing were hostile we would have been shot down without ever having seen it.

As we coursed on through the black night, winging homeward to our field in the south of Italy, the weird craft kept us company. Its position relative to Old Crow's did not vary, its shape did not change, and its brilliance never wavered. I was unable to ascertain the form of the bogey; it could have been a sphere, or a disk at 90 degrees to the Earth's surface, but it was definitely not the exhaust of lights from another aircraft. It positively was neither man-made nor a natural occurrence. After 45 to 50 minutes, our companion from another world simply turned off. Precisely the way that an electric light goes out when turned off by flipping a switch, that is how the Foo Fighter disappeared – it turned off."[600]

In Lou Jagues Jr's book *To Rule the Sky*, published in 1979, Leet gives the date of his encounter as 24th November 1944. Looking at the 2nd Bombardment Group archives, he was serving with the 49th Bombardment Squadron (part of 2 BG) and was the pilot of B-17G-45-VE 44-8020 that evening (Mission #319), flying from Amendola airfield in Italy. According to Leet, his aircraft was named *Old Crow*, although this name only appears twice in a list of over 8,000 B-17 nicknames from WW2, and neither was applied to a 2 BG aircraft. However, further searching revealed that B-17G-55-DL 44-6550 *Old Crow* also served with the 49th BS. This is also omitted from the list of nicknames, but that is not necessarily an issue as many names have not yet been linked up with the official serial numbers. Looking through the missions that Leet flew with 2 BG between September 1944 and April 1945, it would seem that he was never assigned to 44-6550 *Old Crow* at all. What makes researching this case more

difficult is that Leet's brother Warren was also serving in the same unit at that time. If Leet's recollections regarding the intelligence officer's comments are correct, it would be interesting to know where the information on this new fighter had stemmed from, or whether it was simply yet another case of assuming anything that was strange was simply a German secret weapon.

On the evening of the 25th, a crew from the 422nd NFS witnessed four jets, with three together and one lower down. There were no further details, and they did not get close enough to make an accurate identification.[601] The same night saw a second crew, in 42-5564 *Junkin' Judy*, chasing after another "jet", although the operations report stated that it *"turned on the power and lost our aircraft"*.[602] It is difficult to understand what the P-61 crew were pursuing, given that neither of the two operational *Luftwaffe* jet types were flying at night at this time.

The 415th NFS started to see more lights in the skies over western Germany. On the evening of 26th November 1/Lt. Edward "Intruder" Schlueter took off from Longvic, bound for the area between Karlsruhe and Mannheim, looking for targets of opportunity on the ground, or lone enemy aircraft. In the rear of his Beaufighter was his radar observer, 2/Lt. Donald Meiers. After spending about an hour in his designated patrol area, flying at about 2,000 feet, he headed out of the zone. Schlueter then saw a strange light as he headed home. His post-mission report read as follows:

"Upon returning to base, saw a red light flying through area about 35 miles ENE of Point A. Came into about 2,000 feet off starboard and then it disappeared in a long red streak."[603]

The pilot mentioned the light to Capt. Fred Ringwald, the squadron intelligence officer once he returned to Longvic. Although the latter did not know it at the time, he was about to become directly involved in the "Foo Fighter" mystery himself.

More "jets" were spotted by 422nd NFS crews towards the end of November 1944. On the same evening as Schlueter's sighting, the

crew of 42-5557 *Little Linda* had just shot down a V-1 flying bomb when they saw a "jet" going straight up. A second was also spotted by Bolinder and Graham, flying P-61A 42-5565 *Double Trouble* near Bastogne in Belgium.[604] To add to the crews' increasing sense of frustration when they were vectored onto RAF Mosquitoes and other bomber aircraft returning from raids over Germany, numerous "ghost targets" were reported on the night of 29/30th November 1944. Whatever was showing on the Ground Control Intercept station scopes, they presented themselves as low and slow-flying objects, and the crew of 42-5536 *Husslin' Hussey* tried in vain to intercept four of them at separate times during the evening of the 29th.[605] Were these more of the same "Foo Fighters"? Possibly not.

Slow-flying aircraft, at extremely low altitude and at night were much more common on the *Ostfront* than in the West. The Russians began to fly night-harassment sorties over the German front lines and rear areas with Polikarpov Po-2 biplanes in 1942, dropping grenades and small bombs. German soldiers nicknamed these slow-flying nuisances *Nähmaschinen* ("sewing machines") or *Kaffeemühlen* ("coffee grinders") due to the "putt-putt" sounds of their engines. The *Luftwaffe* eventually copied these tactics and employed its own basic trainer biplanes such as the Gotha Go 145 and Heinkel He 50 in the same way, creating several *Störkampfstaffeln* ("night harassment squadrons"), some comprised of Estonian and Latvian crews.[606] The *Störkampfstaffeln* were expanded and then renamed in October 1943, becoming *Nachtschlachtgruppen* (NSGr, or "night ground-attack groups"), each with three or four squadrons. At the peak of their activities in 1944, one *Gruppe* had as many as seventy obsolete aircraft on hand, and some units carried on flying right up until the end of the war. Three of these *Nachtschlachtgruppen* operated on the Western Front from the late summer of 1944, and both NSGr 1[607] and NSGr 2[608] operated a number of slow, obsolete training aircraft such as the Arado Ar 66, Focke-Wulf Fw 58 *Weihe* ("Kite") and Ju 87 *Stuka*, in addition to the types mentioned above. It is likely that some of the 422nd NFS "ghost contacts" were *Luftwaffe* night-harassment aircraft, although

low fuel stocks had severely reduced the number of sorties they were capable of carrying out.

On an unspecified date between Schlueter's 26th November sighting and the end of the month, the pilot was flying in the Strasbourg area and witnessed more lights, although this time, in addition to his radar observer Donald Meiers, the 415th's Intelligence Officer, Capt. Fred Ringwald was also along for the ride. The latter was hoping to see the strange lights for himself, and he did not return to base disappointed. Looking for road and rail targets near the Rhein, Ringwald spotted what he believed were lights situated on some hills in the distance. He asked Schlueter what they were and was told that they were probably stars. It soon became apparent that there were no hills in the direction they were looking. As they looked more closely, around eight to ten glowing orange lights were now seen moving at a terrific speed towards them. Schlueter's encounter appeared in *Flying Saucer Review* in 1962 and recorded the pilot's reactions after he had seen the lights move:

"Getting in touch at once with one of the American ground radar stations, Schlueter reported that he seemed to have about ten German night-fighters chasing him. But the US radar post replied 'You guys must be nuts! Nobody is up there but your own plane. Aint seeing things, are you?'"

The pilot turned towards the lights as he did not want them sitting on his tail. As he did so, they all blinked off and disappeared, reappearing in the far distance once again and finally vanishing after around five minutes.[609] It is unclear whether the lights shifted position almost instantaneously, or whether there was a delay between their disappearance and re-emergence some distance away. In fact, Schlueter was never close enough to work out what they were. Neither he nor his radar observer wanted to make an official report, and for some reason, Ringwald agreed. Perhaps he thought that their sighting was too outlandish to have been believed. His views on this would soon change. This case was cited by Jo

Chamberlin in his now infamous December 1945 *American Legion* article as the first ever “Foo Fighter” sighting. Of course, we now know that this simply was not true.

What was the origin of the term “Foo Fighters”? By December 1944, most of the 415th’s crews had seen the strange lights, although few official reports had been made. Talk of them was, however, often the main topic of conversation each time crews got together. One version of events states that Operations Officer Charlie Horne was listening into a conversation and suggested the phenomenon should be named after a comic strip character, one which was a favourite of many of the squadron’s personnel. “Smokey Stover”, a zany fire-fighter, starred in an eponymously-named cartoon strip. His catchphrase was *“Where there’s foo, there’s fire!”*, and he drove around in a fire truck nicknamed the “Foo-mobile”. “Foo” was supposed to have been taken from the French word “feu”, meaning “fire”. According to this version, Horne suggested calling the mysterious lights “Foo Fighters”.

However, the second version gives 2/Lt. Donald Meiers the credit for inventing the term. An avid reader of the “Smokey Stover” strip himself, the radar observer allegedly coined the phrase after he became rather agitated during a post-mission debriefing in late November 1944. After Capt. Ringwald, the 415th NFS’s Intelligence Officer, had expressed disbelief in Schleuter and Meiers’ tale about one of their sightings, the latter pulled a comic out of his back pocket and slammed it down on the Captain’s desk, shouting *“It was another one of those f**king foo fighters!”* Meiers’ spicy nickname was adopted by the unit but sanitised by war correspondents in their subsequent newspaper coverage of these events. Whichever version was correct, there was no doubt that the phrase “Foo Fighter” had entered the American night-fighter crews’ lexicon. Other crews in the 414th, 416th and 422nd were beginning to see the same lights for themselves and the nickname spread like wildfire. Of course, whoever was actually responsible for calling the phenomenon “Foo Fighters” did not really matter. What they were and how to combat them was more important. The only problem was that the Americans did not have a clue in either respect.

Another encounter at the end of November 1944 involved what appeared to be a suspected V-weapon, possibly a V-2 launch. 1/Lt. Robert Bolinder and 2/Lt. Robert ("Shorty") Graham at first witnessed a series of bright flashes. According to the radar observer, he saw the following:

"Eight or ten flashes on the ground about 15 miles in front of the starboard wing. The smaller flashes were orange, the largest ones white. Directly after that I saw a glowing orange ball at 4,000 feet. It shot up almost straight to over 25,000 feet in 10 or 12 seconds. At its crest, it turned a brilliant white for a split second and vanished."[610]

Although the war diary for the 414th NFS states that their mission on the night of 2nd December 1944 proceeded "without incident", Lt. Baker and Lt. Brown took off from Pontedera on an intruder mission in the vicinity of the *Luftwaffe* aerodrome at Ghedi. Whilst over enemy territory, they saw what appeared to be a steady, "hanging light". Believing it was an enemy aircraft, Baker attempted to close on the target but as they closed to within three miles, it vanished.[611]

The 422nd NFS crews then had some nights off due to bad weather but resumed flights on the evening of 13th December 1944. "Jets" and V-2s were again on the daily report submitted to Ninth Air Force HQ. The crew of 42-5536 *Husslin' Hussey* were operating "freelance" (independent from ground control radar) when the radar observer picked up a "climbing contact" ascending from 11,000 to 15,000 feet. Without visual identification at this stage, it was classed as a "jet", as the speed of the contact was much quicker than the American night-fighter. According to the report, the crew of *Husslin' Hussey "turned inside the jet and passed under it 400 feet once, it was a single jet aircraft. Lost in ensuing manoeuvres."* Elmore and Mapes also had the dubious honour of seeing a V-2 *"going straight up, SE of Koblenz. After the intense light had faded, a red glow was seen until it went out of sight."* [612] This almost certainly was a V-2 rocket, launched from the Koblenz area at either Antwerp or Brussels. A further launch was witnessed by Lt. Paul Smith and Lt.

Robert Tierney in 42-5544 *Lady Gen* on the evening of the 14th. It was seen *"going straight up to Angels 30* [30,000 feet]*, then it took up a heading of 290° from Koblenz."*[613]

Given that the American press had more access to front-line squadrons and their stories appeared to be subject to less censorship when compared to what British war correspondents could print, it was inevitable that sooner or later, news of the "Foo Fighters" would break. In the meantime, the Associated Press circulated a piece on 13th December 1944 entitled *"Silver Balls Floating In Air: Nazis' Newest War Device".* It read as follows:

"Paris, Dec 13 – As the Allied armies ground out new gains on the western front today, the Germans were disclosed to have thrown a new 'device' into the war – mysterious silvery balls which float in the air. Pilots report seeing these objects, both individually and in clusters, during forays over the Reich. (The purpose of the floaters was not immediately evident. It is possible that they present a new anti-aircraft defense instrument or weapon. This dispatch was heavily censored at supreme headquarters.)"[614]

The report related to some of the daylight sightings made by the Eighth Air Force over Germany several months earlier. Clearly the reporters had not got wind of the strange lights that night-fighter crews were encountering, but it would only be a matter of time before that was remedied.

Almost all of the reports dating from November and the first weeks of December had omitted the actual types of German jet aircraft that the crews were seeing. The crews would have received briefings on the known types such as the Arado Ar 234 and Me 262, plus the rocket-propelled Me 163, and yet the reports merely mentioned "jets". It was as though the crews were using the term to explain objects or much more likely, strange, fast-moving lights they could not properly identify or catch up with. The attempted pursuits that ended without visual contact being made may have also involved descriptions of "jets", simply because nothing else could fly

at the speeds that were being recorded on the radar sets at the ground stations and onboard the Black Widow aircraft. However, as readers will have learned by now, there were simply no *Luftwaffe* jets around at night to cause such chases. Clearly something else was creating these contacts.

Another unit operating over the Rhein at that time was the 415th NFS. The unit was then based at Toul-Ochey airfield near Nancy, which the Americans referred to as Advanced Landing Ground "A-96". On the night of 14th December 1944, one of the squadron's Beaufighters, flown by 1/Lt. Henry Giblin and with his radar observer 2/Lt. Walter Clearly sitting behind him, was flying on the French side of the Rhein near Strasbourg.

"A brilliant red light at 2,000 feet going E at 200 mph in the vicinity of Erstein. Due to AI [Airborne Intercept radar] failure could not pick up contact but followed it by sight until it went out. Could not get close enough to identify object before it went out."

According to Giblin, the light was *"4 or 5 times larger than a star going 200 mph."*[615] It was this particular encounter that finally convinced Capt. Fred Ringwald, the 415th NFS's Intelligence officer, to start compiling a list of sightings, which he then planned to send to the Assistant Chief of Staff, A-2 (Air Intelligence) at XII Tactical Air Command. Giblin's sighting was the first incident included on Ringwald's list.

Twenty-four hours after the Associated Press story, another news agency came up with strange tales from the front. Managing to connect the new phenomenon with Christmas, the International News Service filed a story entitled *"Secret Weapon Resembles Yule Decoration".* It basically regurgitated the AP piece and added a festive twist and read as follows:

"Paris (INS) – The Germans on the western front have produced a 'secret' weapon in keeping with the Christmas season, it was disclosed officially Wednesday. The new device, apparently an air

defense weapon, resembles the huge glass balls that adorn Christmas trees. They hang in the air sometimes singly, sometimes in clusters. They are colored silver and other shades and are apparently transparent. No information was available as to what holds them up like stars in the sky, what is in them, or to their purpose. Lately, they have been seen several times floating over German territory."

The *Washington Post* ran a story on the 14th, reporting that the Ninth Air Force (consisting mostly of medium bombers that flew missions in direct support of the front line forces) had encountered the strange silver balls too. In a sub-section headed *"A Guess About The Spheres"*, reporter H. W. Baldwin provided analysis of these objects. Where this had stemmed from was anyone's guess. The article read as follows:

"The 'silver-colored spheres' that our airmen have reported encountering in the skies above Germany may be new types of floating 'windows' intended to confuse the bombing aim of our electronic 'magic eye'. During the winter months, our bombers, more often than not, have been bombing 'blind' through overcasts. The target is picked up by radar and the bombs dropped by the aid of this 'magic eye'. Such spheres drifting about in the sky might interfere with and confuse the radar in the attacking planes, thus making 'blind' bombing impossible, or far more inaccurate than it normally is."[616]

The reporter was referring to H2X (but nicknamed "Mickey"), the American version of the RAF's H2S blind-bombing and air navigation system, which used centimetric radar to "see" through cloud layers. However, Baldwin was not finished describing the potential benefits to the Germans by deploying such a device. Both stories stirred up further press interest in the "silver balls" although they were not what the 415th and 422nd NFS crews had been seeing on their recent missions over eastern France and western Germany. On the 15th,

the AP offered more details relating to the silver balls, suggesting the high level of combat capability they possessed. *"Silver Balls in Reich May Block Radio Signals"* was the headline, and its writer, the AP Radio Editor C. E. Butterfield, provided the following details:

"New York, Dec 15 – It could be that those floating silver balls encountered by American airmen in raids over the Reich are another German attempt to create interference for radio communication and detection signals. Dispatches from the front have been heavily censored, but the fact that the balls are described as silver in color would indicate that they are of a metallic nature, and thus would react on any type of electronic emission. That is, they would mess up the signals. In previous attempts at creating interference, particularly anti-radar, the Germans were reported to have used lightweight, tin-foil like strips of material which they loosed in the air. Apparently, these were not too satisfactory as gravity soon drew them to earth. The silver balls, particularly if made from some light material, would have greater buoyancy and thus stay aloft longer and maintain a more extended interference period."[617]

Butterfield had inadvertently described the Allies' use of the Window anti-radar device as well as the Germans' own counterpart, namely *Düppel*. However, by this stage of the war, both sides knew each other had it, so it wasn't much of a secret. It also demonstrated just how commentators were emulating the air intelligence staff nearer the front lines, who appeared clueless as well in terms of trying to explain what the strange objects were.

Whilst the newspapers back home seemed to be fighting over which one could provide the most sensational stories about the new “silver balls”, the American night-fighter crews were continuing to see aircraft that could not possibly have been there. The area around Bonn appeared to be a particular hotspot for sightings of what were described as “jets”. At around 2030 hours on 15th December 1944, the 422nd NFS’s Lt. Donald Allee and T/Sgt. Richard L. Heggie, flying in P-61 42-5532, spotted what they believed was a Me 163 flying at 5,000 feet between Bonn and Adelman. According to the daily operations report compiled by the unit historian, the mysterious jet was confirmed as a Me 163, but the operations summary classed it as simply a *“single jet aircraft”.*[618] No combat apparently ensued, although in the operations report that was submitted to Ninth Air Force Headquarters, it is stated that the crew fired at the suspected enemy aircraft, but no results were observed.[619] Again, the report of a *Komet* must have been in error as the type flew interceptions at a much greater altitude, usually four or five times as high. Unfortunately, Allee and Heggie died two nights later when their P-61 crashed four miles east of Chèvres whilst they were looking for somewhere to land in poor weather.[620]

This was a busy time for the 422nd NFS as far as “Foo Fighter” and mystery jet reports were concerned, which added to the high workload involved in night operations. On the evening of the 15th, the crew of P-61A-10 42-5573 *Lovely Lady “closed to 7,000 feet on a jet at Angels 5, but it turned on the power and lost our A/C.”*[621] The *Luftwaffe’s* first jet night-fighter unit had just become operational, although with only two aircraft and one trained pilot, it is difficult to understand just how *Kommando Welter* could have accounted for all of the reports made by Allied aircrews at this time. The Me 262A-1a single-seat fighters used by the unit were confined to the Berlin area and therefore did not come anywhere near the 422nd NFS’s area of operations, it is somewhat difficult to work out just what was being chased after that night. Post-war interviews with the unit’s veterans confirmed that the word “jet” had been used as a much more acceptable description for the “balls of light” that they were

encountering almost each night they flew. The 422nd NFS's intelligence officer, Lt. Philip Guba gave the following statement to explain just what was going on at that time:

"At first we thought they were seeing things, and they kept saying these things were chasing them around. Whether they actually identified…. Not when I was on duty, they did not identify a jet as such."[622]

The "Foo Fighter" reports consisted of "jets" that weren't jets and "rockets" that weren't rockets. The mystery still lacked any credible explanation.

More odd sightings were reported on the evening of 16th December 1944. This coincided with the same day that the Germans launched their Ardennes offensive, codenamed *Wacht am Rhein* ("Watch on the Rhine"), but better known to the Allies as "the Battle of the Bulge". Lt. Paul Smith and Lt. Robert Tierney were airborne in their usual mount, 42-5544 *Lady Gen*, patrolling in the area of the US VII Corps front line at 11,000 feet. The crew were vectored onto one contact which turned out to be *"a single light which peeled off to port"* as they closed in. Smith attempted to intercept the target on three separate occasions, but each firing pass resulted in frustration as the "light" evaded his best efforts. Whatever it was, the target disappeared by diving towards the ground and contact was lost amidst the ground clutter. Lt. John Anderson and Lt. James Mogan in 42-5536 *Husslin' Hussey* fared no better, as they had a visual on what was described as *"a port navigation light of an aircraft"* over Gymnich, about 10 km south-west of Köln, although no actual identification of a machine it was attached to was made. At one point, the mysterious "light" passed under the tail of their P-61 Black Widow before contact was lost.[623]

At around 2300 hours on the evening of the 17th, another Beaufighter from the 415th NFS was on patrol, this time over the Rastatt area between Strasbourg and Karlsruhe. The unit's war diary carried the following entry:

"The crew sighted five or six red and green lights in a 'T' shape which followed a/c through turns and closed to 1,000 feet. Lights followed for several miles and then went out."

The unit historian included the following entry for 18th December 1944:

"Our pilots have named these mysterious phenomena which they encounter over Germany at night 'Foo-Fighters'."[624]

It was the first mention of the term in the squadron's War Diary. The lights were originally witnessed in the distance, but after a period of about ten minutes, the pilot suddenly realised they had moved much closer and were directly behind him. As he turned to port and then immediately to starboard in an attempt to evade the lights, they still followed, drawing even nearer. The crew watched as they approached to within 1,000 feet of their aircraft, and then remained at that distance for the remainder of the encounter. They followed the Beaufighter for another few minutes before simply disappearing. Again, the details of the incident were passed to the 415th NFS's Intelligence Officer, Capt. Ringwald, who added them to the list he was compiling. That list was growing in length almost each day.
Meanwhile, across in northern Italy, a strange phenomenon was noted by Capt. Forslind and Lt. Krysa, known as "Skin" (for obvious reasons) and "Minnie the Molecule", in a Beaufighter conducting an intruder mission along the Po Valley on the 17th. According to the pilot, a *"red flare was fired four times between Modena and Po, each time Beau turned onto new vector."* It was classed as a *"striking observation"* by the unit historian (the officer detailed to write up each day's occurrences for XXII Tactical Air Command Headquarters).[625] Was this another one of the red balls of light?

The report for 18th December 1944 saw the terms "jet" and "V-2" being used to describe the same object by the 422nd NFS report writer. First off, however, were the crew of 42-5573 *Lovely Lady*,

piloted by Lt. Donald Show, who after a number of fruitless chases, finally managed to close in on a "jet". Unfortunately for Show, the "jet" suddenly put on a huge burst of speed and climbed away.[626]

Intense press speculation on what the "silver balls" were prompted a spokesman based at the Pentagon in Washington DC to make a brief statement on the subject on 20th December 1944. Inevitably, this made the news too, as the New York Times ran a piece under the headline *"Berlin's Device Futile: Silver Spheres Above City Have No Effect, Capitol Says".* The statement went onto say that it was unclear whether the objects were made of metal, and that all the reports had stemmed from the newspapers, since none had been received from units or commands in the European Theatre of Operations. Details of strange aerial items had definitely been passed onto the War Department by that stage, including information on the strange discs encountered over the city of Stuttgart in September 1943. The press either still had no inkling about the "Foo Fighters" by the 20th, or if they did, they were being asked to keep a lid on it for the time being.[627]

Crews from the 415th NFS continued to see lights in the skies over their patrol areas around Strasbourg and along the Rhein. On the evening of the 22nd, a patrol *"observed two lights, one of which seemed to be going on and off at [map reference] Q-2422."* The crew saw the lights on their way back to base after the radio observer's airborne radar set malfunctioned and bad weather had set in.[628] At around 0600 hours on the 23rd, another crew from the same unit was flying in the Haguenau area. According to the operations report, the crew witnessed the following incident:

"In the vicinity of Hagenau [sic] [they] saw two lights coming towards a/c from ground. After reaching the altitude of the a/c, they levelled off and flew on tail of Beau for 2 minutes and then peeled up and turned away. 8th mission sighted 2 orange lights. One light sighted at 10,000 [feet], the other climbed until it disappeared."[629]

According to the pilot, what the operations report did not mention was that after they peeled off, the lights turned away for a short time

before flying alongside his Beaufighter for a few minutes before vanishing. He believed they were under “perfect control” at all times.[630] Another version of the same encounter suggested that the lights had simply “gone out” after they moved away from the American aircraft.[631]

If any of the crews were under the illusion that the pairs of lights were wingtip navigation lights fitted to *Luftwaffe* night-fighters, the fact that one set had split up, with one climbing away out of sight, should have ruled that particular explanation out. The possibility that they were jet fighters was not dismissed, although American air intelligence was clearly not aware of the *Luftwaffe’s* difficulties in fielding a jet night-fighter unit at that time. Another crew from the same squadron saw what they classed as *“an orange glow”* over the Sarrebourg region of eastern France at around the same time. At around 1730 hours on the same day, another 415th NFS Beaufighter was sent out on an intruder mission, looking for suitable targets of opportunity to attack. The crew witnessed a “red streak” flying across the sky, at an estimated altitude of 10,000 feet. This too was believed to be a *Luftwaffe* jet, although they were too far away to identify it with any certainty.

Lt. David McFalls and Lt. Ned Baker were airborne in another 415th NFS machine on the evening of the 23rd. Whilst being guided by Ground Control Intercept radar, they noticed the following:

“It was a glowing red object shooting straight up. It changed suddenly to a plan view of an a/c doing a wing-over and going into a dive and disappearing.”[632]

This report, like those before them, was passed to Capt. Fred Ringwald, the 415th NFS Intelligence Officer. Although sightings appeared to be a combination of mysterious jet aircraft and lights in the sky, the intelligence officer only included the latter in his report. However, with hindsight, it is likely that the majority of “jet” reports were probably the same thing or an associated phenomenon. The night-fighter crews no doubt wondered when they were going to be

informed about the new German secret weapon that was responsible for all these sightings. Although the lights did little more than follow aircraft, not appearing to show any signs of hostile intent, the American crews did not see things this way, as every light in the sky was a potential *Luftwaffe* night-fighter with a pilot just itching to shoot them down.

In personal correspondence with researcher Jeff Lindell in March 1993, David McFalls was able to confirm the story, along with a few more details. He had first noted an illuminated patch of ground, one where he thought there may have had been some activity:
"Keeping my eyes on that area, there suddenly appeared at about 5,000 feet a fluorescent glowing projectile rising vertically. There appeared to be glowing liquid droplet streams emitting from the rear jet opening. At my altitude of 10,000 feet the 'wingless' projectile, the size of an aircraft fuselage, did a wing-over and plummeted vertically downward and then disappeared completely at about 8,000 feet."[633]

An account of McFalls and Baker's sighting appeared in Renato Vesco's 1968 book *Intercettateli Senza Sparare*, translated into English three years later as *Intercept – But Don't Shoot: The True Story of the Flying Saucers.* Despite not quoting his source directly, instead only attributing the account to a "short but detailed report", the Italian author seemed to mix up their sighting on the 23rd with the earlier one over Hagenau:

"At 0600 [on December 22], near Hagenau, at 10,000 feet altitude, two very bright lights climbed towards us from the ground. They levelled off and stayed on the tail of our plane. They were huge bright orange lights. They stayed there for two minutes. On my tail all the time. They were under perfect control [by operators on the ground]. The they turned away from us, and the fire seemed to go out."

Vesco then added that the rest of the report was censored, but *"apparently it went on to mention the plane's radar and its sudden*

malfunctioning."[634] This was quite a claim, but since it was different from David McFalls' own account, and Vesco had also omitted mention of his source, where had the latter obtained the quote from? The answer can be found in Harold T. Wilkins' 1954 book *Flying Saucers on the Attack*, where the same account is included verbatim.[635] The Italian simply added the part about the radar malfunctioning, as it fitted with the narrative that he was peddling – but more on that in a future chapter. The next question was, where did Wilkins, an author known for sensationalist reporting on UFOs, get his details on the 415th NFS case from? It seems that the answer lay in the December 1945 *"Foo Fighter Mystery"* article penned by Jo Chamberlin for *American Legion Magazine*, and other newspaper pieces appearing earlier that year. In Chamberlin's article, McFalls and Baker's sighting on the evening of the 23rd (which includes the "wing over" reference), and the earlier one over Hagenau at 0600 that morning, are clearly included. Wilkins simply took the crew's names and added them to the earlier sighting, citing a *"report from McFall [sic]".* No crew names have ever been associated with the earlier report.[636] Chamberlin had access to the relevant information due to his particular position in the USAAF but presumably chose to omit them.

Not all of the encounters made it into the daily operations report. One such sighting involved two pilots from the 415th who happened to be flying in the same Beaufighter. Lt. Chester Buscio was flying the aircraft and Lt. Samuel Krasney was doubling up as a radar observer, as manpower was short in the immediate aftermath of the Ardennes offensive. Shortly after take-off, they flew into fog which dissipated once they crossed the German front lines. However, as the visibility cleared, Buscio noticed that he and Krasney were no longer alone. Flying alongside them, holding station just off their wingtip was a large object, about the same size as their Beaufighter. It was a strange combination of a dull grey colour and a reddish-flow, fluctuating between the two. The pilot saw that it was cigar-shaped and devoid of any wings, although it became more amorphous and indistinct when the red glow took prominence. Scared witless by the

object, Krasney told Buscio to take evasive action, but throughout his violent manoeuvres, the pilot could not shake off their mysterious "wingman". Obtaining such a close look at the strange object, both crewmembers were sure that it was not a *Luftwaffe* jet or piston-engined night-fighter. It simply did not look like an aircraft at all. After a few minutes had elapsed, they watched it head off in a different direction and disappear.

After returning to base, Buscio and Krasney told their story to Ringwald and to their commanding officer, Major Harold Augspurger. Neither the CO nor the intelligence officer could explain what had been seen. According to Keith Chester in his book *Strange Company*, all Capt. Ringwald could do was to advise them to *"watch their backs up there."* It is not entirely clear why this sighting was omitted from the list than Ringwald was busy compiling. Krasney's son was interviewed about his father after his death:

"He was very level-headed, very analytical. (…) He entertained the idea that it could be late-breaking German technology. He did express the view that there were a lot of things during the war that were kept quiet."[637]

There had certainly been no Christmas Eve lull for the hard-pressed crews of the 422nd NFS operating over Aachen and the Rhein, as that evening and the early hours of Christmas Day 1944 brought a bumper crop of jet sightings for the crews of the 422nd NFS. The operations report for that night describes what could have almost been called "jet fever" due to the number of sightings:

"Saw numerous jet aircraft, both twin and single engined jets, saw 8 jets at F-2689 flying line abreast stepped down, just before RAF raid."[638]

The chances of encountering single- and twin-engined *Luftwaffe* jet aircraft operating in concert and seemingly in formation at night at that point in the war was impossible. Although one particular type

was in production by the end of 1944, no single-engined jets were yet in service, and the only German night-fighter unit had less than eight Me 262s on establishment at that time. It is doubtful that *Kommando Welter* had eight pilots on strength to fly the jet night-fighters at the end of December 1944, since training had only begun the week before and the newly-promoted *Oberleutnant* Welter was flying only a few operational missions, the only ones carried out at that stage by the unit. What had the American night-fighter crews observed?

The 422 NFS daily operations report submitted on Christmas Day 1944 gave more details of what had happened over the previous 24 hour period. Specifics from two separate encounters made it into the report, the first involving 1/Lt. Eugene Axtell, piloting 42-5568 *Battle Ax*. Ground Control Intercept radar did not pick up the "jet" he and his radar observer had spotted visually and chased into the "Diver Belt", the array of anti-aircraft guns located east of Brussels to defend the city against V-1 attacks. Axtell landed back at Florennes at 0557 hours but was airborne again just forty minutes later on a second patrol between the River Meuse and St Vith. During this mission, he pursued a second "jet" which quickly climbed away and out of sight before it could be engaged. It was described as a "twin jet" so may possibly have been an Arado Ar 234 *Blitz* bomber on an early morning reconnaissance of the German advance into Belgium. [639] If it was an Arado, it was not on a bombing mission, as the aircraft from the *Einsatzstaffel* belonging to KG 76 only got airborne at 0825 hours that morning for their raid on Liege. Two reconnaissance machines belonging to *Kommando Sperling* were also flying that day from Rheine airbase, but it is not known at which time they flew over the battlefield area.[640]

Sgt. Edgar ("Ed") Clark, a staff writer for *Stars & Stripes* magazine, had flown with a 415th NFS night-fighter crew on Christmas Eve. Although he wrote an account of the flight at the time, many details including his unit and the operating area could not be printed due to censorship reasons. However, Clark wrote an article for the *Honolulu Advertiser* in 1950 which gave more details of

his encounter that evening, plus others. He stated that they were *"red or orange colored balls, which rose suddenly from German territory and trailed American planes until they left the area."* Clark included more information regarding his own sighting:

"Foo-Fighters appeared at the height of the Battle of the Bulge, with the last round of German 'V' and other radar-controlled weapons. I had my first experience with them Christmas Eve, 1944, in the vicinity of Karlsruhe. We suddenly saw a red ball appear on the blacked-out ground below us and to our left. In split seconds, we watched it take off, gain altitude with tremendous speed and draw level off our left wing. Because of the darkness we were unable to judge its distance from us or its size. As the red ball moved along with us, the pilot went into evasive action in an effort to shake it off. We turned, we rolled, we dived, we climbed, but the red ball stayed with us. With our unwelcome companion, we continued north for a while and then turned back towards Karlsruhe. In the area where it had first joined us, the red ball disappeared from sight as suddenly as it had appeared, and we continued back to the Nancy area alone."

Clark stated that crews from his unit thought these red balls were German radar-controlled devices, which they used to track the course of Allied aircraft. He stated that once American forces had overrun the area that they were sighted in, the reports ceased.[641] This suggested that they were a German secret weapon, although as we will see, this has never been proven and in fact even the "other side" were totally at a loss to explain just what was being witnessed. Of course, given that the enemy had already developed flying bombs, ballistic missiles and air-to-air rocket mortars, the crews were simply anticipating the next major development to appear.

The 422nd NFS had little opportunity to digest their Christmas meal before they were called upon to chase suspected jets late on the night of the 25th and the early hours of Boxing Day 1944. This

included the unit's commanding officer, Lt. Col. Oris Johnson, who took off from Florennes at 2224 hours in his P-61, 42-5558 *No Love, No Nothing* for an intruder patrol over the Monschau and St Vith areas, the latter having been taken by the German *506. Schwere Panzer-Batallion* just five days beforehand. It was a clear night, with unlimited visibility. Johnson and his radar observer, Capt. James Montgomery, soon had *"two visuals […] made on unidentified bogies taking violent evasive action. They seemed to have tail-warning radar."* Despite the clear weather conditions, the multiple "bogies" defied recognition as *Luftwaffe* aircraft types.

However, one 422nd crew did made a positive identification on one target, even if it turned out to be in error. Anderson and Mogan in 42-5536 *Husslin' Hussey* had left Florennes at 0200 hours on Boxing Day morning for a similar patrol to their commander's. According to the unit's operations report, *"one visual was made on an Me 163, but our a/c couldn't close within 1 mile, and the jet ship just put on the speed and pulled away."*[642] Again, the conditions were clear, yet the crew had identified an aircraft that simply could not have been flying in that particular area or at that time of the night. Anderson and Mogan had chased what was described as *"a S/E* [single-engined] *jet"* at 0300 hours that morning.[643] Both the Ar 234 *Blitz* bomber and Me 262 night-fighter were twin-engined aircraft, and the only single-engined jet in the *Luftwaffe* inventory at that time was the Heinkel He 162 *Volksjäger* ("People's Fighter") and this type was still far from ready for daytime operational service, let alone nocturnal missions. It is likely that this was another fast-moving light or "ball of fire" that had been mistaken for a jet. The possibility that it was a V-1 flying bomb exists, however these weapons were a known quantity by December 1944. Some had been air-launched towards England by Heinkel He 111H-21 bombers off the coast of Holland under the cover of darkness during the month, but none were fired in this manner from over Belgium or Germany. Although the term "Foo Fighter" was by now in everyday use, the unit's daily operations reports submitted to a long list of recipients, including the US Ninth Air Force and British Second Tactical Air Force commands, omitted

any mention of the nickname. The same report included details of the mission that was flown by P-61 42-5543 *Tennessee Ridge Runner*. The crew reportedly chased a “balloon” between the US V Corps front lines and the Rhein.[644]

The evening of Boxing Day 1944 saw no let-up in the number and variation of reports being given to the 415th NFS’s Intelligence Officer. Capt. Ringwald was informed by one crew that they had seen *“red balls of light hanging in the air for ten seconds”*, followed sometime later by *“two yellow streaks of flame”* which disappeared from view as the pilot dipped and turned his Beaufighter. Enquiries made to “Blunder”, the GCI station responsible for the area, came up negative. The crew also reported flying through what was described as a kind of “prop-wash” and had also noticed another set of lights which *“made distinct lines”*, almost arrow-shaped in appearance. Another crew witnessed a vertical line of white lights, spaced evenly and holding station at 10,000 feet. Suddenly, four of the lights turned simultaneously.[645] This report was not included in the squadron’s war diary but did end up in Capt. Ringwald’s list of sightings that would be eventually passed to XII Tactical Air Command Headquarters. For the time being, though, he was holding off sending that particular communique. It is assumed that Ringwald wanted a much longer list of encounters so that senior officials would realise that there was an issue worth addressing.

Another encounter, involving Lt. Floyd Lott and his radar observer, Lt. Anderson Henshaw, was also omitted from the 415th NFS War Diary. The pair were patrolling in the Worms area at around 500 feet, looking for German road and rail transport to attack. Although it was pitch dark, the skies were clear and the visibility perfect. Both men were acutely aware that their aircraft also presented a target for any alert *flak* gunners on the ground. Instead of being hunched over his airborne radar set, Henshaw was standing up in his compartment, looking out of his Perspex “bubble” located midway along the fuselage, just in case they had company. This proved to be worthwhile. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a circular-shaped “fiery ball” appeared just behind the tail of their Beaufighter.

He shouted a warning to Lott, who did not react straight away. After Henshaw's second alarm call, the pilot threw the aircraft into a hard starboard turn, continuing to circle until he thought he would be on the tail of whatever was behind them. However, it had followed their aircraft throughout the manoeuvre. Whatever was following them, it was not registering on Henshaw's onboard radar set, nor generating any jet or rocket exhaust.[646]

Lott resumed his previous course as the object did not seem to be threatening them. Henshaw managed to get a better look at it and realised that instead of being a fiery ball as first thought, it was actually *"three vivid, circular, reddish-blue lights, looking like flames, in a tight inverted triangle formation".* The radar observer described them as a "triangle of ovals", each of which looked like the exhausts fitted to a radial engine. After about five minutes, the lights disappeared. Back at Florennes, Lott and Henshaw passed details of the incident to Lt Anderson, Ringwald's subordinate. He checked with "Corned Beef", the GCI station, who reported that they had not picked up any aircraft on their scopes.[647] The consensus was that the crew had seen a new secret weapon, one which was being deployed in concert with jet night-fighters. The Ar 234 and the Me 262 were incapable of the sort of manoeuvres that Lott and Henshaw had described. Three lights in an inverted formation sounded suspiciously like one of the black triangles that became a major part of more contemporary reporting.

Multiple lights were seen by another 415th NFS crew on the evening of the 27th. The following was recorded in the unit's War Diary:

"1st patrol saw 2 sets of 3 red and white lights. One appeared on port side, the other on starboard at 1,000 to 2,000 feet to rear and closing in. Beau peeled off and lights went out, nothing on GCI scope at the time."

Taking evasive action, the pilot banked and descended to 8,000 feet. The lights suddenly vanished. He contacted "Churchman", the

Ground Control radar, but they informed him that there was nothing on their scopes.[648] It was as if the USAAF crews were being chased by ghosts. The sighting had occurred near Sarrebourg, and the Beaufighter had been flying at around 10,000 feet. Another crew from the same unit had a sighting of their own:

"Observed lights suspended in air, moving slowly in no general direction and then disappeared. Lights were orange, appeared singly and in pairs. These lights were observed 4 or 5 times throughout the period."[649]

By this point, Major Harold Augspurger, the 415th NFS's commanding officer, had heard of several incidents reported by his crews. Although he personally had not witnessed anything, he was not flying as many missions as his men, and therefore the chances of seeing the lights for himself were reduced. However, he decided to carry out a mission on the evening of 28th December 1944, hoping to see something that could be explained by simple observation and his greater experience. His men were beginning to become understandably nervous about being tailed by possible German secret weapons, although so far none of them had actually been attacked by the strange lights. Jumpy crews made mistakes, and he did not want to lose any of his men to unfounded rumours that made them careless.

Augspurger took off from Florennes in his personal Beaufighter Mk.VIF, T5049 *Night Mare*, with 2/7Lt. Austin Petry in the rear compartment. He considered Petry to be the unit's most experienced radar observer and therefore wanted him along in case they encountered any of the "Foo Fighters". Crossing over the Rhein from France into Germany, they looked for targets of opportunity but were also watching out for anything out of the ordinary. Flying under 1,000 feet, Augspurger was checking for lights whilst Petry was glued to his SCR-720 radar set, watching for the tell-tale signs of potential *Luftwaffe* night-fighters. However, the Germans were not flying that night, or at least in that sector. *Night Mare* and its occupants were

alone, or so the unit's commander believed. Glancing briefly at his instruments, as Augspurger looked outside again, he suddenly spotted *"a white light out off to the starboard, right off the wing."* Petry had nothing on his scope, so he had to look out of his "bubble" canopy to confirm the pilot's sighting. In the dark, and with no frame of reference, neither the pilot nor the radar observer could work out how large the object was. Was it an aircraft or a flare? Certainly not the latter, as the light was now pacing the CO's aircraft, sitting at an unknown distance off their starboard wing tip.

Major Augspurger turned towards the light to allow Petry a chance of picking the target up on his radar set, as the SCR-720's dish antenna in the nose of his Beaufighter could only "see" in a limited arc. The pilot then opened up the aircraft's throttles and bored in on the white light. However, there was still nothing on Petry's scope, and he could not understand what was happening. He had checked the set out himself: it was serviceable. About thirty seconds later, the pilot reported that the target *"just took off and went straight up […] straight up at a tremendous speed"*. Augspurger watched as the light shot upwards, climbing several thousand feet above them before finally vanishing.[650] On returning to base, both related their sighting to Capt. Ringwald, who Augspurger knew was compiling a list of such incidents. The latter checked with the ground radar station, which unsurprisingly had failed to pick up any trace of the mysterious light. Although there was no way of estimating distance from the unknown object thought to be generating the light, Petry was sure it was well within his airborne radar's coverage, and if not, then certainly the ground station's.

Although Ringwald was still putting together his report, the fact that the CO had also seen one of the mysterious lights required immediate action. He wrote up an account of the sighting and sent it to the Air Intelligence department at the 64th Fighter Wing Command Headquarters, to which the 415th NFS was subordinate. They immediately forwarded it to XII Tactical Air Command HQ, who also passed it on to the First Tactical Air Force (Provisional) HQ. A copy found its way to the Air Intelligence staff that were commanded by

Major General Carl “Tooey” Spaatz, Commander, Strategic Air Forces in Europe, and it is almost certain that the report was seen by his Air Technical Intelligence Group.[651] Although it had finally reached the eyes of senior command and intelligence staff, did it mean that anyone was actually taking notice of the phenomenon? Events that occurred a week or so later seemed to indicate that they were taking their time.

In the early hours of 28th December 1944, Lt. Col. Oris Johnson and Capt. James Montgomery were again airborne in their P-61A, 42-5558 *No Love, No Nothing*, bound for a patrol over the German rear areas around St Vith and Monschau. They managed to obtain *“a visual on a jet a/c flying top cover for an unidentified a/c.”* Again, the visibility was reported as excellent, but neither type of aircraft could be determined.[652] Johnson was unable to get close enough to the suspected *Luftwaffe* machines to engage them in combat.

An undated report from 1944 involved one of the *Carpetbagger* B-24 Liberators flying over Occupied Europe. *Carpetbaggers* was the nickname given to the squadrons of the 801st BG, later renamed the 492nd, initially located at Tempsford and then Harrington in England. Its role involved dropping weapons, explosives, ammunition and supplies to resistance groups fighting the Germans. Its B-24s also carried agents (“Joes” and “Josephines”) who parachuted behind enemy lines. Aircraft from the unit generally flew alone and at night. Sgt. Robert May was a tail gunner in a Liberator belonging to one of the two squadrons at Harrington. He vividly recalled seeing a “Foo Fighter” on a dangerous and secret mission which took his aircraft over Occupied Europe in 1944:

“I spied something out there, kind of bright, didn’t know whether it was an aircraft or what it was. I’d say it was probably travelling at a fairly decent speed, maybe 200, 300 miles an hour. And it was coming towards us, but it was coming as a bright light. That’s what made it so odd, that we could not identify that. We all knew exactly what enemy aircraft were out there. We knew what they were very easily, because it’s one of the things we learnt real quickly.”[653]

1945

The New Year's celebrations soon gave way to the normal operations conducted by units across the European Theatre. Weather reconnaissance flights were key to the success of the American daylight bomber offensive over Germany. Lone aircraft had to fly long, dangerous sorties across enemy-held territory with little or no advance warning of poor conditions. Tasked with checking the weather over potential targets, the flights had to cover a huge amount of ground over Europe to stop the Germans learning of the USAAF's plans. Weather recce crews therefore overflew primary, secondary and several other possible targets, all during the same mission. Each sortie could last five or more hours. The missions were codenamed "Bluestocking" and given the level of sightings that the night-fighter force had run up during the previous five months, it was almost inevitable that these units would have their own encounters at some stage.

The 25th BG (Light) comprised two units equipped with Mosquito PR Mk.XVIs, namely the 653rd and 654th Reconnaissance Squadrons.[654] Unarmed but usually fitted with cameras, the fast "Mossies" were ideally suited to the weather recce role. In the early hours of 2nd January 1945, Lt. John ("Jack") Green and his navigator, Lt. Warren Barber, took off from RAF Watton in Norfolk, on a mission scheduled to cover northern Belgium, Holland and northern Germany as far as Berlin. At 0230 hours, they were overflying the Zuider Zee in Holland at around 30,000 feet on what the pilot described as a *"beautiful and starry night".* Suddenly, directly in front of them, two orange balls of fire appeared. Green initially believed that his fear of meeting one of the *Luftwaffe* jet fighters had just come true, thinking the lights were Me 262 exhausts. He was an experienced pilot, having already completed a "tour" of 30 missions on B-17s[655], and would end up as the 653rd's commanding officer.[656] In George R. Sesler's 1996 book *Aerial*

Intelligence of the 8th Air Force, Lt. Green gave an account of what happened next:

"In that instant I froze, tense, ready to do something. But then it became apparent that they were moving in our direction and at a rate of closure that was not unusual. As they moved, they seemed to be in tandem, as if somehow connected, retaining the same apparent distance from each other. They came in a straight line towards us then moved so as to pass of our starboard wing at the same altitude. At a point about 120 degrees from our nose, they shot upwards at a rate of climb that could only be described as incredible. At a point about 70 degrees up from the horizon, the balls of fire went out."

Warren Barber contributed to Charles Bastien's book *32 Co-Pilots*, about the 492nd BG and its crews' subsequent flying careers once the unit was disbanded in August 1944 due to heavy losses. He included details of the reconnaissance mission to Berlin where the "Foo Fighters" were spotted:

"On one mission to Berlin, the two of us saw Foo Fighters over the Belgium/Holland area; Jack Green was the pilot. The nearest description would be 'two fog lights flying at high rates of speed that could change direction rapidly'. During debriefing, the intelligence officer told us that two RAF night fighters had reported the same thing. For two weeks we were a joke at the officers club until it was reported in the London papers. Similar Foo Fighters were seen at least two more times in Europe and the Pacific Theater. These two sightings, and the RAF night fighters, were the first reported anywhere."[657]

Of course, we know that their encounters were not the first in Europe, but Barber and Bastien were both possibly unaware of the previous sightings. Clearly whatever Green and Barber had witnessed, it was not a *Luftwaffe* jet night-fighter, as the lights would

not have been in tandem, and at no time did they identify the type of aircraft involved. Me 262s were certainly not flying over Holland at night in any case. However, if the crew thought that was the end of the encounter, they were sorely mistaken:

"As we continued our flight, saying nothing, two pairs of these lights appeared suddenly off our port wing, flying level formation with us. They appeared quite close and slightly larger than those we saw first. How large were they? We couldn't tell. We had no point of reference. When sighted dead ahead, they might have appeared to us as large as a radial engine might appear at a thousand yards out. They could have been very small, in fact, and close in or very large and miles away."

Green's comment here is worth taking onboard. Trying to work out how far away and how large a light in the sky was a matter of guesswork. Seeing something that was potentially off in the distance, without any reference points, or an idea of what it was, meant that there was no way of calculating size or distance, unless it flew behind a known landmark or a cloud formation. Before Green could react to the lights hanging off his wing tip, they disappeared.[658]

Lt. Green and Lt. Barber had been at 30,000 feet when they first encountered the lights. In a post-war interview, the radar observer said that *"they seemed to wanna just flip ahead of us and back and forward."* He did not believe they were flares, as both he and the pilot had witnessed those on plenty of occasions. The lights were described by Barber as looking like fog lights, lacking any discernible shape beyond that of a three-foot circular ball. If that was not enough, they also had the ability to change speed rather rapidly. Back on the ground, the pilot told their intelligence officer about what they had witnessed, but Barber claimed that he had been ordered to keep it quiet. It is probable that as this was the first sighting by the squadron, the intelligence section did not know what to do with the information. The logical thing would be to keep it secret until they received further guidance from headquarters, and that appears to be

what happened. However, looking at the report that was filed by the squadron's intelligence officer, Green and Barber had seen the lights over Germany as well as Holland.

Capt. Finis D. McClanahan, the 25th BG's Intelligence Officer, compiled a report for the group's CO. He opted to leave out what may have been considered the more sensational aspects of the encounter, but the main facts of the sighting were certainly included:

"Crew observed pairs of bright yellowish orange lights evenly spaced which seemed to be floating around in the air, never in front, but always in rear or on either side. Lights were brilliant while on and at times faded, either in the distance, or were turned off. Aircraft was at 30,000 feet when lights were first seen. While over Zuider Zee at 0230 hours lights were seen for first time and as aircraft approached Berlin at 0310 two more were observed. Getting closer to Berlin, at 0330 hours, three more were seen. No attacks were made on aircraft hence the crew was not certain as to identity of lights."[659]

If McClanahan or the unnamed intelligence officer from the 653rd BS(R) were entertaining any ideas about being able to keep a lid on the sightings of strange lights over Europe, the American war correspondents were about to change the situation entirely. Whilst newspaper columnists in the States were still trying to print new angles in the "silver ball" story that did not want to go away, the "Foo Fighters" were about to grab the headlines in a much more spectacular fashion. Robert Wilson, an AP correspondent based in France, was permitted to visit the 415th NFS base at Toul-Ochey on 31st December 1944 and had even gained permission to fly with one of the unit's crews, in order to "see in the New Year" in the skies over Germany. Whilst Beaufighter crews were not usually too keen to take along passengers "for the ride", Floyd Lott and Anderson Henshaw had volunteered for the duty. However, bad weather kept all three men on the ground. Wilson had unfortunately missed out on his story. Or had he? Celebrating the end of the Old Year at the base with the 415th's crews, the reporter soon found himself being

regaled with tales of strange lights they had encountered during recent missions. Presumably, this would have included Lott and Henshaw, the crew who he was supposed to have flown with that night, as they had experienced a “fiery ball” following them just after Christmas and it would have been fresh in their memories. After he heard similar stories from several pilots and their radar observers, Wilson realised the crews were not trying to string him along, nor were the stories the products of drunken servicemen. There was something going on in the skies over western Germany, and they even had a name for the phenomenon – “Foo Fighters”. He spent New Year’s Day writing and then sending his story, and it was published in numerous newspapers on 2nd January, under the headline *“Balls of Fire Stalk US Fighters in Night Assaults Over Germany”.*[660] The sub-heading was equally as alarming: *“Mysterious ‘Balls of Fire’ Race Beside Planes For Miles”.*

Unlike the previous stories about the “silver balls”, Wilson’s piece included the names of several 415th NFS crew-members who had experienced the “balls of fire” during missions, but of course their unit was not identified, and the location was only given as *“a US Night Fighter Base, France”.* However, for the folks back home in the States, it was the first public mention of Donald Meier’s name for the lights:

“Yank pilots have dubbed them ‘Foo Fighters’, and at first thought they might explode, but so far there is no indication that any planes have been damaged by them. Some pilots have expressed belief that the ‘Foo Fighter’ was designed strictly as a psychological weapon. Intelligence reports seem to indicate it is radio-controlled from the ground and can keep pace with planes flying 300 miles per hour.”

Anonymous reports were acceptable in terms of defining the phenomenon, but Wilson had included a quote from Meiers himself:

"Lt Donald Meiers of Chicago, Ill, said there are three types of 'Foo Fighters' – red balls of fire that fly along at wing tip; a vertical row of three balls of fire which fly in front of the planes, and a group of about 15 lights which follow the plane at a distance, flickering on and off. 'A 'foo-fighter' picked me up recently at 700 feet and chased me 20 miles down the Rhine valley,' Meiers said. 'I turned to starboard, and two balls of fire turned with me. I turned to the port side, and they turned with me. We were going 260 miles an hour and the balls were keeping right up with us. On another occasion when a 'foo-fighter' picked us up, I dove at 360 miles per hour. It kept right off our wing tips for a while and then zoomed up into the sky. When I first saw the things off my wing tips I had the horrible thought that a German on the ground was ready to press a button and explode them. But they don't explode or attack us. They just seem to follow us like will-o'-the-wisps."[661]

Interestingly, the account suggests that Meiers was a pilot, when in fact he was a radar observer. Being a syndicated story, a few newspapers added items of local interest, especially if an airman came from the same area, or the editor simply wanted to stand out from his competitors. The Chicago Tribune quoted two further 415th NFS airmen, including Meiers' pilot, Ed Schlueter, whose name was spelt incorrectly.

"Lt Wallace Gould of Silver Creek, N. Y., said the lights followed his wing tips for a while and then, in a few seconds, zoomed 20,000 feet into the air out of sight. Lt Edward Schlater, of Oshkosh, Wis., said he had seen the 'Foo-Fighter' on two occasions and it 'looked like shooting stars'. Pilots agreed that the balls of fire were more numerous over large German cities. None saw any structure on the fire balls."[662]

The Chicago Tribune piece went on to list the names of no less than twenty other crew members belonging to the 415th who had encountered the phenomenon. The 415th NFS's Intelligence Officer,

Capt. Fred Ringwald, was even quoted in the *St Louis Post Dispatch* version of Wilson's story. Listed as a "staff officer" to disguise his true position in the squadron, the piece claimed he had gone up in a Beaufighter to see what the crews were talking about. This of course referred to his own flight with Schlueter and Meiers at the end of November 1944. The newspaper used his account of what they had seen during the flight:

"I saw lights off the right and told the pilot, who said 'Oh, those are lights on a hill.' Watching the lights for several minutes, he said, 'Well, that hill is considerably closer to us now.'"[663]

Some of the published versions also included more commentary from the AP Radio Editor, C. E. Butterfield, who suggested the following, appearing to dismiss the air intelligence theories on how they were guided:

"While dispatches hint that they are radio controlled, the fact that they travel along with a plane or stay a certain distance ahead would tend toward the belief that they instead are magnetic. Thus, the metal of a plane would attract them, at the same time holding them at a distance." "Radio control from the ground or another plane would not permit such apparent accuracy in control."

Butterfield seemed as though he was throwing out explanations without much in the way of scientific analysis, ones which were hampered by a complete lack of data, but his column was apparently taken quite seriously in the higher echelons of the USAAF. Members of General Spaatz's Air Technical Intelligence Group, who presumably had been made privy to the details of Major Augspurger's' sighting a week earlier, were intrigued by the radio columnist's theory regarding magnetism and sent out a message to their forward teams in the field, instructing them to look out for related technology. The same orders were given to the department charged with interrogating German prisoners of war, which was

instructed to ask additional questions about the “balls of fire”. It soon became clear that no-one on the Allied side of the front lines had a suitable explanation for the phenomenon. No captured equipment had been capable of such flight characteristics, and the questioning of POWs yielded no useful information. Indeed, the latter had turned up nothing. Whilst reports of “Foo Fighters” had appeared in the daily operations reports for at least a couple of months by that stage, it seemed that apart from Ringwald’s report, no-one had any detailed information covering the scale of the issue beyond brief mentions in the daily operations reports. That would soon change.

More American newspapers jumped on the “Foo Fighter” bandwagon. Whilst some seemed to have access to information that others apparently lacked, it was more likely that they were just including the less sensational aspects of the sightings that the heavyweights did not have room for. The *Palestine Post* included details provided by William Steen from the news agency Reuters, under the heading *“Strange Goings On In West”*. His information came from Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), commanding all of the Allied forces in north-western Europe:

“Strange things are happening at the front this New Year’s Eve. American pilots reported seeing green Thunderbolt fighters shadowing them over Germany and ground troops swore they saw a large, oval cylindrical object believed to be an observation balloon, floating over the German lines. Both puzzles remain unsolved.”[664]

“Green Thunderbolts” was a new description. A slightly different name for the phenomenon appeared in the British *Daily Telegraph*, which ran a story entitled *“Alsace – Monday: Now the Phoo Fighters”.* The story obviously dealt with the same sightings, but presumably the editor had decided to spell “Foo” differently or had simply misspelt it:

“Phoo fighters are the big topic among our intruder pilots. These are strange orange lights which follow our planes, sometimes flying in formation with them and eventually peeling off and climbing. Some have come within a few yards and have been shot out. Another type of phoo fighter appears under the wings, making a series of dull flashes.”[665]

On first glance, it was difficult to tell whether the newspaper was referring to RAF sightings or the spate of American reports appearing in publications across the Atlantic. The report probably came from one of the American reporters in Occupied Europe, so it presumably referred to the latter. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the term “Phoo Bomb” would soon appear almost out of nowhere. Although the name never appears in official RAF reports, the reference to lights being “shot out” could have referred to the combat claims made during the Düsseldorf and Bochum raids carried out at the beginning of November 1944 as described in Chapter 2. As for POW confirmation, I have yet to find records of interviews where German prisoners described any type of radio-controlled ramming weapon.

This avalanche of news stories about the “Foo Fighters”, “balls of fire” and “mystery spheres” clearly had some effect in the higher echelons of Air Intelligence. Major-General Lawrence Bissell, assigned to the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, part of the War Department’s General Staff in Washington D. C. (WDGBI), must either have seen or had been apprised of the huge press coverage. That same day, 2nd January 1945, his request for more information was sent to SHAEF:

“Press reports red balls of fire accompanying planes in flight termed ‘foo fighters’ by air personnel. Desire explanation if available.”[666]

Such a request could not be ignored, turned down, assigned a low priority or simply forgotten about. Air Intelligence staff at SHAEF contacted the commanding officer of Second Tactical Air Force, the

RAF's Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, who assured them that suitable enquiries would be made throughout his command. Other sections of the Allied Air Forces in Europe were presumably contacted too. The following day, the Assistant Chief of Staff for A-2 at SHAEF, Air Commodore Colin Grierson, replied with a message titled "Secret".

"Careful investigation shows that on one occasion only has a red ball of fire accompanying an aircraft been reported (…). This in November [1944] by IX Tactical Air Command when formation reported ME 109 joined formation in number five position and was seen to emit what appeared to be a red ball of fire which followed the aircraft for some 2-3 seconds. ME 109 then broke away. FOOFIGHTER not known here." [667]

The inclusion of the Bf 109's strange "weapon" is intriguing, but it did not seem related to the sightings being made by the night-fighter crews based in France. Grierson's message appeared to be dismissive of the whole phenomena and seemed to demonstrate a lack of awareness among more senior RAF intelligence staff at SHAEF. If his investigations had turned up absolutely nothing beyond the strange report listed above, then the earlier reports sent by No.5 Group to Bomber Command HQ had obviously fallen on deaf ears. However, the Air Commodore had only been in post for a year and had not been posted to A-2 from a front line unit. According to R. V. Jones in his book *Most Secret War*, Grierson had found himself out of his depth during the huge amount of work needed to co-ordinate attacks on suspected V-1 flying bomb launching sites in northern France the previous summer. He was soon relieved of duties in this regard, which were passed to Jones, although in terms of official reporting to Winston Churchill, the RAF officer still retained nominal control.[668]

Acknowledgement of the increased amount of press coverage was also mentioned in a memo dated 3rd January 1945 sent by an unidentifiable Lieutenant-Colonel from M.I.15 at the War Office to

Major P. Greenhalgh of Flak Liaison Officer HQ at No.5 Group, RAF. Although specifically dealing with daylight phenomena, it showed the inability of Allied Air Intelligence to identify the mystery devices seen in the skies over Occupied Europe. The memo itself had a very wide circulation, including six other RAF operational bomber groups, the USAAF's 1st, 2nd and 9th Bombardment Divisions, a Sqn Ldr Varcoe at a department known as "Intelligence 3" within Bomber Command, and Lt. Col. Surbeck, the Director of Intelligence at Strategic Air Forces Europe. In its entirety, it read as follows:

"Reference your FLO/5/15 dated 20 Dec 1944, the phenomenon to which you refer has received considerable publicity in the Press recently, but I am afraid we can add little in the way of useful comment. In the early part of this year a fair number of reports were received from the American high-level daylight operations of observations of 'tennis balls' and 'balls of cotton wool'. These manifestations were unexplained and were in any case seen at considerable altitudes, as opposed to the recent spate of reports of 'silver balls' which generally appear to be at lower altitudes, such as below 10,000 ft.*

Two suggestions which have been put forward are that some of the reports may conceivably refer to small parachutes emitted from the parachute-and-cable type of Flak rockets of which three calibres are now known to be in use, or that they may arise from residual smoke puffs from incendiary pellets seen in calm conditions and bright sunshine. Neither of these, however, seem particularly likely. An unofficial suggestion which has recently been received, but for which there is at present absolutely no confirmation, is that the enemy is firing, presumably from some kind of rocket projector, a projectile containing aluminium spheres filled with incendiary gas, the gas being emitted at a pre-determined height with the object of causing an explosion in aircraft engines or otherwise interfering with their proper functioning.

We shall be glad of any further suggestions on this subject which for the present remains extremely obscure."

The asterisk referenced a pencilled in note at the bottom of the page which read “silver balls”.[669] The Americans had been seeing strange objects over Germany for two years but were clearly no further forward in solving the question as to what they represented. The “three calibres” of *flak* rocket mentioned in the memo referred to experimental explosive devices which were rumoured to be in use by *Luftwaffe flak* artillery units, although details of these were still fairly sketchy. The British Army had developed a similar system during 1940 for use against low flying enemy aircraft, although their Parachute and Cable (PAC) device was only effective up to 300 or 400 feet. These weapons were installed on numerous Royal Navy vessels and warships to provide defence against anti-shipping strikes. However, it did not take long for the Army and the Navy to realise that this rocket-projector proved useless in actual combat. Only a few *Luftwaffe* aircraft were ever downed by these weapons.[670] The PAC installations were soon removed and replaced with anti-aircraft guns that proved much more effective. Not only were PAC devices inaccurate, but on land they spread unexploded munitions around on friendly territory with the potential to kill or injure military personnel and civilians alike. It is almost certain that the Germans experimented with such weapons but given the complete lack of coverage any such weapon receives when dealing with Nazi *flak* devices, it is likely that any trials were abandoned due to similar results being recorded. As for the possibility of the mysterious spheres being a delivery system for some special type of gas, this would be considered again a few weeks later.

Whilst the number of reports over Europe fell during January 1945 due to a couple of weeks of bad weather, providing poor visibility for pilots and the likelihood of crashes and fatalities for little result, press speculation back home still continued apace. Although most commentators could not give any kind of firm answer to explain what was going on, this did not stop them from trying. In the 13th January 1945 edition of *Science News-Letter*, the weight of opinion had swung behind enemy secret weapons being the source of the sightings. This was also based on similar reports of strange lights

that were coming from the Pacific Theatre of Operations. Echoing C. E. Butterfield's beliefs at the beginning of the month, the only consensus appeared to be that the lights were not radio-controlled and that there may have been some magnetic force involved. A few additional theories were espoused. These included a new type of ordnance that was designed to destroy Allied pilots' night vision, a detection apparatus for German *flak* gunners to help find their targets, and the after-effect of "*spots in the pilot's eyes"*, which appeared as luminous balls hovering on an aircraft's wing tip.[671] Clearly the "experts" of the *Science News-Letter* were just as much in the dark as the night-fighter pilots and USAAF Air Intelligence were.

Relatively obscure scientific journals were one thing, but when the likes of *Time* and *Newsweek* started to run similar stories, the War Department began to take notice. Both publications ran articles dealing with the "Foo Fighters" on exactly the same day, 15th January. Although its own piece was largely a re-hash of what had already appeared elsewhere, *Time* hedged its bets by sitting on the fence:

"If it was not a hoax or an optical illusion, it was certainly the most puzzling secret weapon that Allied fighters have yet encountered."

It went on to report that scientists were baffled by what crews were seeing. Explanations regarding radio-control or magnetic properties were trotted out again, noting that front-line correspondents and armchair experts were having *"a Buck Rogers field day"* trying to work out what was happening. However, *Time* did throw a new element into the mix, namely that the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and Britain's M.I.6 had been receiving secret reports for some time about a strange phenomenon involving aircraft engines. According to the article, they had been informed of a device that could *"cut a plane's ignition, thus stop its engine in mid-air."*[672] One may recall mention of the *Estimate of German Capabilities in 1945* report that mentioned gases that had this effect on aircraft engines,

and the case involving the flight of four Thunderbolts. Whilst this was clearly exercising minds within Air Intelligence, it had apparently affected only two bombers and four P-47s (that the staff were aware of), and it was also still unclear if gases had actually been deployed. However, this is something worth bearing in mind, and we will return to it when discussing a pair of hitherto unknown German secret weapons in Chapters 13 and 14.

Some of the "armchair experts" back in the States suggested that the USAAF night-fighter crews were seeing nothing more than St. Elmo's Fire, the flame-like phenomenon that was occasionally seen on the top of church steeples or ships' masts during electrical storms. This, and other mundane explanations, annoyed the crews of the 415th NFS no end. *"Just let the sons-of-bitches come over here and fly a mission with us. We'll show 'em!"* was one pointed comment made by the night-fighter personnel.

Newsweek took a more cautious approach, inside allowing the 415th NFS crews themselves the opportunity to offer suggestions as to the exact nature of the "Foo Fighters". Given their prominence in previous newspaper articles, it was only fitting that comments made by Lt Meiers and Lt Schlueter were included in this new piece. If anyone thought it was just going to be a re-heated version of the earlier reports, they were in for a surprise. The *Newsweek* article revealed an explanation offered by Meiers and Schlueter, one which was seen in print for the first time. They talked about a suspected German secret weapon:

"Possibly they are the results of a new secret anti-radar device which the Germans have developed. On the other hand, they may be the exhaust trails of a smaller model of the radio-controlled Messerschmitt 163, a rocket-propelled flying wing. Day bombers have met the Me 163, which has an explosive charge in the nose and is apparently designed to crash into Allied planes."

Another pilot in the same unit had *"closely inspected foo fighters tagging him"* but had seen nothing but spheres.[673] *Newsweek's*

description of the *Komet* was incorrect in terms of the explosive charge and the ramming tactics, and the aircraft was certainly not radio-controlled from the ground.

Bad weather had prevented the 422nd NFS flying many sorties in the first two weeks of 1945, but four aircraft managed to get airborne and fly patrols over the rear areas of the German advance into Belgium on the evening of 16th January. 42-5568 *Battle Ax* took off from Florennes at 2050 hours to patrol the "bomb line" between XIX Corps and the Rhein. Its crew made radar contact with a fast moving target, suspected to be a jet but it was never confirmed visually.[674] Little else was reported that month, apart from a mystery "bogey" that crept up behind one of the unit's seven Douglas A-20G Havoc bombers, 43-9953, whilst it was on a night intruder mission in the final hours of 29th January. The light appeared as the Havoc crew were on their final run-in to the target. The bomb aimer then had problems dropping his four 500lb bombs as the switches would not release them for sixty seconds following the toggling of the switch. [675]

Pressure to act was building up behind the scenes on both sides of the Atlantic. However, the initial response from senior officials did not come from SHAEF's Air Technical Intelligence Group or the War Department in Washington DC. It came from further down the chain of command. On the same day that the 422nd NFS crew encountered their "jet", XII Tactical Air Command's Air Chief of Staff for Air Intelligence, Lt. Col. Leavitt Corning Jr., sent a "Secret" memo to his opposite number at the First Tactical Air Force (Provisional). Titled "Night Phenomenon", it stated the following:

"1. The following is quoted from training and tactical information supplied by the 415th Night Fighter Squadron for the month of December 1944.

We have encountered a phenomenon which we cannot explain; crews have been followed by lights that blink on and off, changing colors, etc. The lights come very close and fly formation with our planes. They are agitating and keep the crews on edge when they encounter them, mainly because they cannot explain them. It is

requested further information be furnished on this subject, such as similar experience of other night units.
2. Further information is requested."

Four days later, Lt. Col. Corning received a reply from First Tactical Air Force, stating the following:

"There have been no instances reported. Before an investigation can be made, it will be necessary to have more complete information, such as colors of the lights, their intensity, size, duration, and at what altitudes seen; also, if the lights are observed at any specific hours. Do subject lights cross Allied lines and in what direction are they seen to travel? Also, has it been noted: on what part of the aircraft are they carried, i.e., wing, tail, prop; and how close do they approach our aircraft?"[676]

It appeared that Air Intelligence at First Tactical Air Force HQ had received no reports of the "Foo Fighters" at that stage. and needed more information before trying to make sense of the reports. Their queries also displayed a complete lack of understanding, asking for details of where the lights were fixed to the "aircraft" that the pilots were supposedly seeing. It would have been clear from the 415th NFS reports that no aircraft were in fact visible. But was it clear? Apparently not, since all that XII Tactical Air Force were receiving from the 64th Fighter Wing A-2 were simply condensed versions of the mission reports sent to them by the 415th NFS, and these would have been all they had to work with. In order to obtain the required details asked for by First Tactical Air Force, Lt Col. Corning bypassed the 64th and contacted Capt. Ringwald at the 415th NFS directly for more data.

On the 19th, Lt. Philip Guba, the 422nd NFS's intelligence officer, had sent a rather lengthy report titled *"Request for Information Regarding Night Fighter Squadrons"*, which covered the period September 1944 to January 1945, to the Commanding General of the Ninth Air Force, Major-General Hoyt S. Vandenburg. In a section

headed *"Encounters with Enemy Aircraft"* and a sub-heading listed as "Jets", the following was noted:

"Have been unable to determine mission, as they generally fly at altitudes in excess of 10,000 feet and make no effort to attack ground targets or our own aircraft. Possibly they are waiting for mass RAF raids."[677]

This belied the fact that the only *Luftwaffe* jets operating at night were the handful of machines allocated to *Kommando Welter* (later 10./NJG 11), and they were almost exclusively confined to missions in the Berlin area.

Meanwhile, back at SHAEF, there were also developments that would eventually affect the fledgling investigation. A group known as the Scientific Intelligence Advisory Section (SIAS) was set up under the guidance of Doctor Victor H. Fraenckel. American and British staff members were part of the group, as advisors *"regarding the acquisition and exploitation of intelligence and information concerning scientific, technological, and kindred developments, processes, and concepts which the Germans have produced."* It was an umbrella organisation whose duties included advising the Combined Intelligence Objectives Subcommittee (CIOS), who selected targets for the T-Force "technology grabbing" teams that were created at around the same time. In addition, SIAS would co-ordinate all intelligence investigations into scientific and technological work carried out in Germany. The ground work for the exploitation of the enemy's secret research and weaponry was being started and an examination of the whole "Foo Fighter" phenomenon appeared to be well within its remit, and SHAEF presumably wanted this to be investigated to take some of the pressure off them. The Director of Intelligence for the US Strategic Air Forces in Europe, Brig.-Gen. George C. McDonald, wrote the following in February 1945:

"In Russian hands, or about to be in their hands, are believed to be answers to German technical developments which might, if ignored, prove to be an 'ace in the hole' against our Air Force before this war is over."[678]

One of the targets identified as potentially falling into Russian hands was the suspected *flak* rocket testing facility at Leba in Poland, near the Baltic Sea. The Soviets did capture it in early 1945 and continued to use the site after the war for test launches of rockets, particularly meteorological ones. Leba was not closed down until 1974.[679]

January did not end without a final encounter involving of the 415th's crews, however. At around 0010 hours on the morning of the 30th, between Landau and Wissembourg, a Beaufighter crew saw two amber-coloured lights *"in the air at 2,000 feet."* When they were first noticed, *"one light was 20 to 50 feet above the other"*, and they were estimated to be about a foot in diameter. The lights closed in on the night-fighter, but the pilot then turned towards them in case he had to open fire. As he did so, they suddenly disappeared.[680]

Capt. Fred Ringwald did not need much time to reply to Corning's request for more information, as he had been compiling his list of sightings and reports by the 415th NFS crews since mid-December 1944. He sent a message on 30th January to XII Tactical Air Command, listing the details of fourteen separate encounters by crews from his unit, including as much of their sighting reports as was possible. Although Ringwald's report related to sightings which have already been listed here, it is worth repeating in full in order to show the scale of the phenomenon that was encountered by just one of the American night-fighter units in the European Theatre of Operations. It also shows what information XII Tactical Air Command received and had to finally work with:

"1. In compliance with paragraph 3 of 1st incl., the following extracts from the Sortie Reports of various pilots who have encountered the Night Phenomenon are submitted for your information.

Night of 14-15 December 1944 – 'In vicinity of Erstein (V-9381) flying at 1000 ft. observed large red light at 2000 ft. going East at 18:40 hrs. Travelling at approximately 200 MPH.'

Night of 16-17 December 1944 – '20 miles North of Breisach (W-0173) at 800 ft. observed 5 or 6 flashing red and green lights in 'T' shape. Thought they were flak. About 10 minutes later saw the same lights much closer and behind me. We turned port and Starboard, and the lights followed. They closed in to about 8 O'clock and 1000 ft. and remained in that position for several minutes and then disappeared.'

Night of 22-23 December 1944 – 'Patrolling at Angels 10 from Strassbourg North and South of highway. At 06:00 hrs. saw two lights coming towards A/C from the ground. Upon reaching altitude of plane, they levelled off and stayed on my tail for approximately 2 minutes. Lights appeared to be large orange glow. After staying with A/C for approximately 2 minutes, they would peel off and turn away, fly along level for a few minutes and then go out. They appeared to be under perfect control at all times. Lights were seen somewhere in vicinity of Hagenau.'

Night of 22-23 December 1944 – 'Observed reddish colored flames at considerable distance and at approximately 10,000 ft.'

Night of 23-24 December 1944 – 'Approximately 10 miles South of Point I (Q6745) noticed to NE approximately 5 miles a glowing red object shooting straight up. Changed suddenly to a plane view of an A/C doing a wing over and going into a dive and disappearing.'

Night of 26-27 December 1944 – 'At 01:45 hrs. saw two yellow streaks of flame flying at same level at approximately 3000 ft. off port side. We also saw red balls of fire that stayed up for 10 seconds approximately 45 miles away. After seeing yellow streaks, made starboard vector, lost altitude and streaks disappeared from view. Called GCI Blunder and asked if any E/A were in vicinity. They answered No. Instructed to return to Angels 10. We felt what was thought to be prop wash; very distinct. Noticed several groups of lights off port while patrolling in vicinity of Q-9050 and R-1556. Lights made distinct lines somewhat like arrows.'

Night of 26-27 December 1944 – 'While on vector 090 near F-7050 during patrol we observed airborne white lights. They were staggered evenly vertically, and we could see from 1 to 4 swing at once. They appeared stationary at 10,000 ft.'

Night of 26-27 December 1944 – 'Observed light at same altitude while in vicinity of Worms. Observer saw light come within 100 ft. Peeled off and took evasive action, but light continued to follow for 5 minutes. Light pulled up rapidly and then went out of sight.'

Night of 27-28 December 1944 – 'While on North heading in patrol area noticed in vicinity of Q-1378 lights suspended in air moving slowly and would then disappear. Were orange in color. Lights appeared singly and in pairs. Observed these lights four or five times during period.'

Night of 27-28 December 1944 – 'Eight miles NE of Luneville at 19:10 hrs. saw three sets of three lights (red and white) one on starboard and one on port from 1000 ft. to 2000 ft. and closing in at Angels 10. Pulled up to Angels 8 and lights went out. Called Churchman to see if there was anything in area. Received a negative reply.'

Night of 30-31 December 1944 – 'Saw a group of lights flying through the air 30 or 40 miles East of base while flying at Angels 9-10.'

Night of 1-2 January 1945 – 'Saw 'Foofighters' North of Strasbourg and North of Saverne.'

Night of 14-15 January 1945 – 'Observed a large orange glow in sky appear. 5 ft. in diameter in vicinity of Ingweiller at 6000 ft. at 20:00 hours.'

Night of 29-30 January 1945 – 'At about 00:10 hrs. sighted a Foofighter about half way between Weissenbourg and Landau. Foofighter was off to the starboard and rear at Angels 2. Lights were amber and one was 20-50 ft. above the other and of about 30 seconds duration. Foofighter was about 1000 feet away and following. The lights were about a foot in diameter. Lights disappeared when Travel 34 turned into them.'"

Capt. Ringwald also included a note regarding the lack of radar contacts:

"2. In every case where pilot called GCI Control and asked if there was a Bogey A/C in the area he received a negative answer. Foofighters is the name given these phenomenon by combat crews of this Squadron."[681]

XII Tactical Air Command intelligence staff now knew there was a potential problem to be addressed, one which did not show up on radar. Even if it did not seem to be hostile, the phenomenon was a distraction at the very least, one which could possibly detract from the overall efficiency shown by front-line night-fighter crews. The issue could no longer be ignored, but the report had to be passed further up the chain of command before that would happen. This would delay any response still further.

Capt. Ringwald's list of sightings had clearly stirred up interest in the First Tactical Air Force (Provisional) HQ's Air Intelligence section, but it appeared they were impotent in the face of this entirely new phenomenon. They also needed to send the report higher up. Lt. Col. Corning, Air Chief of Staff for Intelligence at XII Tactical Air Command, forwarded a copy of the 415th NFS "Foo Fighters" list to his opposite number at First Tactical Air Force. On 5th February 1945, the request for further investigation went even higher. On 5th February 1945, Col. A. C. Young, Assistant Chief of Staff, sent details of the correspondence between his office, XII Tactical Air Command and the 415th NFS, together with the following accompanying memo to the Chief Intelligence Officer located at Supreme HQ Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in Paris:

"1. Forwarded for your information.
2. This headquarters has no further information or explanation in connection with these phenomena.
3. It is believed that further investigation is warranted. Since appropriate technical personnel are not available within the First

Tactical Air Force, the matter is forwarded for such further investigation as may be advisable."[682]

The reply from SHAEF took precisely six days to arrive at First Tactical Air Force. They had no information either. Air Commodore Colin Grierson, the Air Chief of Staff for Intelligence at SHAEF, replied with the following message on 11th February 1945:

"The matter is, therefore, being referred to the Air Ministry in order to find out whether any further information can be obtained from that source. It is also hoped to make arrangements for an Air Technical Intelligence Officer from USSTAF [US Strategic Air Forces Europe] to visit the Unit concerned."[683]

It was clear that Grierson remained blissfully unaware of the numerous units encountering "Foo Fighters" across Europe, as he was planning to send an intelligence officer to talk only with the crews from the 415th. One can draw from this that most of the previous reports of strange lights had not progressed too far up the chain of command. However, things seemed to be moving in terms of investigations involving senior officers and the Air Technical Intelligence branch. To give him his due, Grierson contacted USSTAF to suggest that qualified personnel be assigned to look at the phenomenon more closely. His "Secret" memo of 11th February 1945 also contains information about where details of the 415th NFS sightings were forwarded to. The following note was sent to Col. Bradley, the USSTAF's Chief Technical Intelligence Officer:

"1. Attached are copies of papers received from the First Tactical Air Force (Prov). From the number of reports quoted in the 2nd W/Ind from the 415th Night Fighter Squadron, it would seem that there must be something more than mere imagination behind the matter, and in view of the fact that pilots and crews are becoming slightly worried by them, it is considered that everything possible should be done to get to the root of the matter.

2. Copies of the reports have been sent to the Air Ministry for their consideration, and the Scientific Investigation Division of this Headquarters (Mr. Robertson) has also been asked to consider the problem.
3. In the meantime, it is requested that it might be as well for an Air Technical Intelligence Officer to visit the Unit concerned and obtain reports and impressions at first hand from aircrew personnel."[684]

It would be over a month before Grierson received a reply from the Air Ministry in London. However, this memo is important, as it confirms that an official investigation into the "Foo Fighters" was now underway. Robertson was a member of the most important scientific and technical intelligence committees and groupings based in England, and therefore had immediate access to all reports and other material regarding the phenomenon. If he needed assistance, both Alvarez and Griggs were at hand to offer advice, and no doubt all three had input with regard to prisoner of war questioning, especially when *Luftwaffe* or V-weapons personnel were concerned. Given that Robertson had also been a member of the London Mission for several years, he also presumably had access to the Air Ministry's paperwork, which had details of RAF sightings. In addition, a specialist from USSTAF's ATI visited the 415th NFS to interview aircrew. Details of these discussions are yet to be discovered, however.

However, the ATI officer was not the only person to turn up at Toul-Ochey airbase to speak to 415th NFS personnel at this time. According to Major Augspurger, a small group of visitors turned up at the airfield but did not introduce themselves to him, as per the usual protocol. Instead, they headed straight for Capt. Ringwald's office, and subsequently interrogated Augspurger's crews. The commanding officer was busy with other matters so did not intervene, but he believed that the strangers were sent from Washington DC. Their visit was obviously secret, so much so that Augspurger's commander at the 64th FW, General Barkus, did not mention it at all, but as the latter had never talked about the "Foo

Fighter" sightings that the 415th were reporting, this comes as no real surprise.

According to Major Augspurger, one or two of the Washington visitors went up for flights with Capt. Charlie Horne, with Capt. Ringwald manning the radar set and radio. The strangers had initially expressed doubts about the veracity of the sightings, so it was decided to take them up to see if the "Foo Fighters" would show themselves. Unfortunately, nothing was seen by the visitors during these flights, and they departed after a day spent with the squadron. [685] In *Strange Company*, Keith Chester suggested that one of the men may have been David Griggs, the radar specialist. Evidence for this came from a letter that he had sent to Edward Bowles, the advisor to the US Secretary of War, confirming that he had just spent "a week's tour of the front". [686]

December had clearly been the high water mark for sightings, as the first few weeks of January 1945 saw a run of bad weather which effectively grounded the night-fighter units, with only a small number of missions actually being flown. This no doubt accounts for the sharp drop-off in the sightings reported, although once the crews started flying again in earnest at the beginning of February, the numbers of encounters soon increased. On the evening of the 2nd, one of the 415th's crews was patrolling the Colmar region of France at around 1845. The pilot and radar observer suddenly saw a green light appear. It passed them on their starboard side, moving rapidly as it did so, heading west somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 feet in altitude and around three miles in front of their Beaufighter. The crew were not close enough to identify the target. [687]

Crews from the 415th NFS saw strange lights on consecutive nights during the second week of February 1945. On the night of the 8th, one saw *"a yellow light at 9,000 feet ten miles north of Strasbourg"* for around a minute. The following night, near Riegel in Germany another saw *"a very bright light moving slowly through the air at 6,000 feet, which lasted for 20 seconds."* On that occasion, the crew could not determine its point of origin. [688] The 415th were

certainly not short of sightings at this time. Another report in the squadron records reads as follows:

"Mission 2, 1800-2000. About 1910, between Rastatt and Bishwiller, encountered lights at 3,000 feet, two sets of them, turned into them, one set went out and the other went straight up 2-3,000 feet, then went out. Turned back to base and looked back and saw lights in their original position again."[689]

This particular sighting took place at 1910 hours on 13th February and was experienced by the crew of the second of two sorties that evening.[690] The same report gives details of a *"brown object, some four by six feet, drifting towards* [the] *ground at 1400 hours."* This strange item was seen in the Homburg area and was first spotted at 3,000 feet. A day later, another crew from the 415th NFS was flying near Landau when their attention was drawn to *"a string of lights north of Freiberg (1 red one in centre, 4 white ones on each side) blinking on and off."*[691]

The 414th NFS unit historian described at length what Lt Gravel and F/O Moore had witnessed whilst on patrol near Pisa in the early hours of 16th February 1945:

"At 0130 hours, while patrolling at 15,000 ft, near Pisa Air Base, fighter observed a flare and upon circling flare asked Ackbridge [ground control radar] for a fix. Fix placed and scene of flare approximately ten miles north of Pontedera. At 0140 hours, fighter observed a second flare which appeared to have fallen between Pontedera and Pisa. At 0145 hours, fighter observed a third flare, which seemed to spiral, in the vicinity of Pisa. Blue Sector Control reported that this third flare dropped at Marina d'Pisa. The flares were observed to burn at 6,000 feet, then disappear below overcast. At 0150 hours, fighter saw a spurt of flame, which went out immediately just west of Viareggio. This spurt of flame appeared to be between 10,000 and 13,000 ft. Fighter gave chase immediately. During chase, two more spurts of flame were observed with the last

spurt of flame continuing until it was lost in clouds below 6,000 feet. This believed to be jet propelled aircraft made two 290 degree turns then continued on a straight course and losing altitude during chase. Fighter chased the jet propelled aircraft for fifty miles out to sea west of Pisa, on a 240 and 270 deg heading where aircraft was lost in clouds."[692]

As their fuel state was running low after the high-speed chase, Lt Gravel broke off the pursuit at 0215 hours and returned to base. He reckoned that his P-61 Black Widow was doing at least 400 mph in a shallow dive whilst chasing the suspected jet aircraft. At no point in the chase did his radar operator pick up a contact on his Airborne Intercept radar set.[693]

Whilst no Me 262 jet fighters were ever based in Italy (although at least one landed in the north of the country in April 1945), plans were made for a small detachment of three Arado Ar 234B-1 *Blitz* jet reconnaissance and bomber aircraft to operate from Osoppo airfield, located near Udine in northern Italy, from early February 1945. The unit was known as *Kommando Sommer* after its CO, *Oberleutnant* Erich Sommer. However, by 16th February, Sommer's three Arados had still not departed from western Germany and his tiny ground element was attacked by Allied fighter-bombers near Worms.[694] The first Ar 234B to arrive in Italy did so on 24th February, the sole machine belonging to *Sonderstab Götz* ("Special Staff Götz"), flown by *Hauptmann* Horst Götz. This was effectively a one-man, one-aircraft outfit, although it was recognised by the headquarters of *Luftwaffe* forces in Italy as an independent unit. Eventually, Sommer reached Italy by road and his three Arados were based at Campoformido, near Udine, from the beginning of March. These aircraft performed vital recce missions over the Allied front lines and beyond, their speed preventing Allied fighters from intercepting them. Given the above dates, it is unlikely that Gravel and Moore were attempting to catch an Arado jet reconnaissance aircraft, so the question is, what were they pursuing?

Crews from the 416th NFS, which was also based at Pisa, started to regularly report their own “Foo Fighter” sightings in February 1945. One of the first official mentions occurred on the 17th, when the squadron’s war diary, previously filled with tales of official visits, bad food, accommodation, and news from their detachment in France which was on the point of returning to Italy, struck a slightly more mysterious note. However, the writer could not help including a humorous tone to the proceedings:

“Our crews are beginning to report mysterious orange-red lights in the sky near La Spezia and also inland. These ‘foo-fighters’ have been pursued, but no-one has been able to make contact. GCI [Ground Control Intercept] and intelligence profess to be mystified by these ghostly apparitions. The hypothesis that the foo-fighters are a post-cognac manifestation has been disproved. Even the teetotallers have observed the strange and mysterious foo-fighters which have also been observed by night-fighters in France and Belgium.”[695]

Another report, this time mentioning “several “Foo Fighters”, appeared in the following day’s entry but there were no further details given in the diary. In fact, the unit had experienced three days of strange aerial phenomenon. On the 16th, Lt. Kangas and Lt. Herron reported seeing “a suspected jet” in the area of La Spezia. The pilot believed that a series of white flares were being dropped by a jet aircraft. Kangas gave pursuit, reaching 380 mph and closing in on the target, but it disappeared into a convenient hole in the cloud. According to the pilot, Ground Control Intercept radar had “clocked” the bogey at 458 mph. Speeds of this nature would indicate a jet-propelled machine, although as the first Arado Ar 234 jet did not arrive in the country until at least a week later, it is difficult to work out what the crew had spotted. Was this an example of one of the first radar-visual UFO cases in Italy, and if so, why was the possible “Foo Fighter” finally being picked up on radar when none of the previous ones had been? According to the operations report, there

was no radar coverage of the “bogey”, so what was Kangas referring to?[696]

The second entry in the 416th’s War Diary related to a sighting near Massa on the night of 17th February, the crew of a Mosquito seeing what they described as *“a red ball of fire travelling a curving course”* and heading west. They watched as it climbed and then suddenly dove into the valley just south of the town. The crew was certain that it was not a jet, stating that they had not witnessed any *“spurts of flame”* being emitted. In any case, the Arado was a twin-engined aircraft, so surely two balls of fire would have been spotted if it had been exhaust flames?[697]

On the evening of February 18th, one of the 416th NFS Mosquitoes appeared to be led on a wild goose chase around the La Spezia area. Half an hour after arrival on their patrol station, the crew observed what they described as a blinking light twenty miles away. It seemed to be illuminated for a period of about 45 seconds then disappeared. Nearly an hour later, it was back again, only this time much closer. On this occasion, the pilot reported it as a *“reddish-white light going off and on in spurts about six or eight miles away, near La Spezia at 10,000 feet, going NE”.* He turned the Mosquito to chase after the light, but it soon began flying in what was termed as *“an erratic course”* before it finally faded out and disappeared. Ten minutes later, the pilot saw the light again, this time at around 9,000 feet some ten miles south of La Spezia. It turned and headed north as he began to pursue but stopped short of following it over the port in case it was some sort of “*flak* trap” that the Germans had set up to catch an unwary crew. However, fifteen minutes later, the light was back once again in the same starting position, just south of the city. This time, the pilot elected to overfly La Spezia and follow the light wherever it went.[698]

Reaching 300 mph in the pursuit, the Mosquito’s Rolls-Royce Merlin engines roared as the crew flew over the port, strangely attracting no *flak* at all as they flew over it. If the light was supposed to be a decoy of some type, it was a poor one. However, the pilot’s efforts were completely in vain. As he tried to close the gap, the light

faded from view and then disappeared. It had either been extinguished or had shot off into the distance at an incredible speed. However, this was still not the end of the crew's encounter. Almost on the point of deciding to return to base, they saw the light again, this time ten miles away. Another tail chase ensued, the pilot describing what he was pursuing as *"a glow that alternated between weak and bright."* The 416th NFS crew simply could not close the distance, even when the pilot pushed the engines of his Mosquito to the limit. At no point had the radar observer been able to pick up the target on his own set, and the pilot's calls to his Ground Control Intercept radar station were replied to each time with the same response. They had nothing on their scopes either. No jamming had been detected by either the ground station or the night-fighter's radio observer.[699] Unfortunately, the crew had not been able to get close enough to determine what the light was fixed to, if indeed that was the case. It was a complete mystery.

Some commentators have suggested that 414th and 416th NFS crews only started reporting "Foo Fighters" in February 1945. Their reasoning relates to the fact that both units sent small detachments of aircraft from Italy to assist the 422nd and 425th NFS whilst they were based in Belgium and France in late January 1945. It has been argued that returning crews brought back tales of strange lights and other phenomenon and told their colleagues based in Italy, and so their own sightings began in February 1945.[700] Earlier in this chapter I have listed cases involving both the 414th and 416th NFS in the autumn of 1944, so whilst the unknown lights may not have been called "Foo Fighters" at that time by their crews, they were already starting to see similar lights by that stage.

Reporters with access to the front-line aircrews in France and Belgium had not forgotten about the "Foo Fighters". The crews themselves were also obviously still smarting over the negative comments made regarding their ability, given the sceptical scientists who had been quoted in *Time* back in January. Sgt. Edgar Clark, a staff writer for the European version of *Stars & Stripes* magazine, was presumably the target for some pointed replies from the night-

fighter crews, as he soon came up with the following piece entitled *"Men Who See 'Em Say Foo-Fighters Can't Be Poohed"* which was published on 19th February 1945:

"WITH THE 1ST TACTICAL AIR FORCE, Feb. 18 – Discussion of the Foo-Fighters, weird thingamajigs spotted by U.S. night fighters over enemy territory, reached a new peak here today as Beaufighter crews received news from home that the Foo-Fighters were figments of the imagination and strictly from the realm of make-believe. Particularly disgusting to the night fliers who have seen Foo-Fighters off and on for the past four months was a recent article in Time which said 'Skeptical scientists, baffled by the whole affair, were inclined to dismiss the fireballs as an illusion, perhaps an image of light which remained in the pilots' eyes after they had been dazzled by flak bursts.'

Nobody, the Beaufighter crew members agreed, was prepared to explain the Foo-Fighters, but they were incensed to learn the phenomenon had been lightly passed off as a case of spots before their eyes. Many of these night fighters are veterans of the African and Italian campaigns, which lacked the added attraction of Foo-Fighters. As one pilot, Lt. Owen H. Davis, St. Petersburg, Fla., and his navigator, Lt. Warren G. Rodick, New Orleans, put it: 'If we're starting to see things now, we'd better quit and go home.'

Without ever having actually met, these Beaufighter men have at least accumulated a passing acquaintance – better than others – with the Foo-Fighters, during their last four months of operation over German territory. They described them as balls of colored light which rise from the ground in Krautland and move in on the U.S. night fighters shortly after they near or cross the battle lines. Sometimes they are in sets, as many as ten. Their color has ranged from red to orange, yellow, white and even blue. Playing it safe, no Beaufighter crew has yet allowed the Foo-Fighters to close in but has always gone into evasive dives and turns while the thingamajigs were still a sure distance off the wing or tail tips."[701]

Two days after their pursuit near Pisa, Gravel and Moore were again out on patrol, this time in the Mantova area. The 414th NFS unit historian wrote that they had *"another interesting observation: four very bright lights appeared from Mantova area at 8,000 ft and seemed to remain stationary in the air until they burned out. Smoke could be seen coming from them."* Lt Robert Schaeffer and Lt Marion Ayres were also in the same area around 2145 hours and also witnessed bright lights, this time two of them which appeared directly in front of them. The pilot opened fire on the lights and strafed the ground below them, but no results were noted.[702] Both crews dropped Nickel leaflets between Bologna and Massa, and the unit records also mention that Gravel and Moore *"were still seeing 'great balls of fire' on their first patrol flight between 0300 and 0525 hours"* the following morning. [703]It is interesting to note that at this point, three months after the phrase "Foo Fighter" had been coined in France, American units based in Italy were still referring to the lights as "flares" or "balls of light".[704]

On the previous day, the 64th FW intelligence summary included a report about a brownish-gold object in the skies above Neustadt in Germany. It measured three to five feet diameter and was at an altitude of 3,500 feet when seen at around 1700 hours.[705] It was clearly too small to be a German *Sperrballon* ("barrage balloon"). This sounded like a similar object to the one spotted by a 415th NFS crew on 13th February 1945.

In northern Italy, the 416th NFS had two separate sightings over the course of as many days. On the 21st, one of their Mosquito crews saw *"two large red balls of fire"* hovering between 4,000 and 5,000 feet for about ten minutes whilst they were on an intruder mission in the Piacenza area.[706] The following evening, two of their colleagues were flying a similar sortie over the Po Valley, heading for a GCI "sweep" of the area around La Spezia. Over the Mediterranean, about twenty miles west of Livorno, they noticed three lights, red-orange in appearance, that seemed to be simply hanging over the water. They *"burned about a minute"* before disappearing but the crew did not believe they resembled flares.[707]

During the last week of February 1945, crews from the 414th were continuing to report mysterious “flares” in the Bologna area. On the 23rd, two crews saw *“balls of fire which burn for four or five minutes and then suddenly go out.”*[708] Lt. Dohrman and Lt. Lucian Beam were flying near the city in their P-61B on the 24th and a summary of their mission again appeared in the unit records. It was prefixed by a short statement suggesting their report was typical of others received during the previous weeks:

“From 1845 to 1915 hours, from one to three clusters of balls of fire appeared at about 10,000 ft in the vicinity of Bologna. As one or more clusters would burn out, another cluster would appear.”[709]

Three days earlier, Lt. James Rausch and Lt. James Lindlof had reported seeing clusters of up to fifteen orange lights along the Po Valley, which disappeared each time they got close. They apparently saw at least five groups of these mysterious lights before returning to base.[710]

On 27th February, another 416th NFS Mosquito crew had a sighting. This time, they were patrolling a line north and south of Bologna, looking for “trade” Their Ground Control Intercept station vectored them onto a “bandit” that was flying up at 20,000 feet, but when they reached that altitude and the correct position, it was gone. The GCI radar station had also lost the contact. At around 2000 hours, the same crew spotted what they described as “three lights”, estimated at about 10,000 feet and in the shape of a triangle. The pilot dove in pursuit, but his radar operator could not obtain a contact, even though the “triangle” was now directly in front of them. Shoving the engine throttles forward to gain every single available horsepower, the crew closed in on the suspected enemy aircraft. However, when they were an estimated 2,000 feet away from it, the *“triangle of lights disappeared”*.[711]

The 27th saw more strange entries appearing in the 414th NFS unit history daily reports. The unit had put up five P-61s for patrols over the front lines in the area around Bologna, and two crews saw

“balls of fire” north and south of the city. Lt. John Gordon and F/O Leonard Gigerich, plus Lt. Dohrman and Lt. Beam, witnessed these north and south of Bologna, ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 feet.[712] Whatever the phenomenon was, the numbers of sightings were growing in number, and some defied any kind of explanation. The following evening, Lt. Col. Carroll H. Bolender, commanding officer of the 414th NFS, witnessed a *“very illuminating reddish fire which appeared to extend from near the ground to 8,000 to 10,000 ft in the Mantova or Parma area. The fire burned for about ten minutes.”*[713] A fire that was not on the ground, but stretching nearly two miles up into the air? In addition to the CO, Capt. Clark from the same unit saw the “fire” too. All of the 414th NFS reports were signed off by Major Hamilton, the unit’s Executive Officer, for the attention of XXII Tactical Air Command Headquarters.

In a letter to M. A. Tuve at the US Embassy in London, H. Guyford Stever, who was a scientific liaison officer with the London Mission, wrote about the Messerschmitt Me 328 “sub-sonic chaser plane”, rumoured to be pilotless and yet resembling the Me 163 *Komet*.[714] However, his following comments were much more important:

“With the considerable guff about foo-fighters and other secret weapons that is now being passed around verbally and by the newspapers, every flyer interprets what he sees in a pretty exciting way.”[715]

Although scathing of the phenomenon, Stever had listed “Foo Fighters” as a category by themselves. This suggests a level of segregation regarding reports and other information used by technical intelligence staff looking at German secret weapons. Stever visited liberated France several times to inspect and examine captured technology. In 1958, he served on the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics’ Special Committee on Space Technology with Wernher von Braun.

Late on the evening of 5th March 1945, one of the 25th BG's 653rd Reconnaissance Squadron's red-tailed Mosquitoes was flying another "Bluestocking" mission over Holland and northern Germany in advance of Mission 868, five "Carpetbagger" sorties and other leafletting raids across a number of locations. At 2247 hours, and whilst they were at an altitude of 20,000 feet, Lt. Smith and Lt. Kuehn witnessed *"a large orange ball"* that seemed to be around 5,000 feet below them. It disappeared after about five seconds. Fearing the *flak* gunners were about to bracket his aircraft, Smith descended to the same level, 15,000 feet, and just a few minutes later witnessed the same phenomena now *"moving horizontally at the same altitude".* It was apparently some distance away, although this time it hung in the sky for around fifteen seconds before finally vanishing. Back at base, the 653rd RS's intelligence officer, Major Finis D. McClanahan, could not explain what the crew had seen.[716]

Exactly four nights later, another 25th BG Mosquito crew encountered a set of lights. Major Hugh Bozarth was extremely experienced in dealing with bad weather conditions, having flown Lockheed P-38 Lightnings in Iceland before being transferred to the 25th BG. By the end of the war, he would go on to fly numerous weather reconnaissance missions over the Continent. On the night of 9th March 1945, he was flying over the North Sea towards the North Friesian Islands, following the track of what would be the following day's raids against marshalling yards at Munster, Rheine and Osnabrück. As they crossed the North Friesian Islands at around 10,000 feet, with a layer of fog below them, Bozarth and his navigator, Lt. Anglum, suddenly witnessed three white lights that had just appeared ahead of them. The lights did not seem to form a uniform pattern: one was low down and the other two were estimated to be 15,000 feet above their Mosquito. According to the pilot, they *"had the appearance of white flares dropped in air"* and looked like parachute flares, even fading out in the same way." However, the manner and positions in which the "flares" had suddenly appeared seemed to influence how the mission was recorded in the unit's daily operations report. The lights were listed as *"3 Foo-Fighters"*, which

also showed that even the reconnaissance squadrons were aware of the phenomenon at that stage of the war.[717]

Although the unit had started fitting bombs and rocket projectiles to its P-61s to allow them to perform night intruder missions behind the German lines, 422nd NFS crews continued to report mysterious "jets" during these missions. 9th March 1945 saw another nocturnal "Me 163" sighting. P-61A-10 42-5575 *No Love, No Nothing II*, with Lt. Thomas Burleson and radar observer 2/Lt. William Monahan onboard, took off from Florennes at 2048 hours, the pilot making his way to his patrol zone on the eastern side of the Rhein, flying at around 10,000 feet. Two Ground Control Intercept vectors saw Burleson chasing "friendlies" in the shape of two RAF Mosquitoes, but he also had *"a 15 minute encounter with an Me 163. Went from Angels 7 to 19 [7,000 to 19,000 feet]; fired two long bursts, with no strikes were observed."*[718] A dogfight with a Me 163 at night simply did not make sense, although as we have seen from previous reports issued by night-fighter units, "Me 163" may well have simply been a misreporting of the "balls of light" that were following Allied aircraft over Belgium and Germany. Clearly something small, without tailplanes and moving very fast was being seen, or was it simply something that resembled flames coming from a rocket exhaust? An almost identical encounter would take place involving the same unit just ten days later.

Air Commodore Grierson finally received a reply from the Air Ministry on 13th March 1945. This came from DDI2, the Deputy Director responsible for matters of technical information relating to German administration, industry and airfields. Group Captain E. D. Hopkins had written a short memo entitled *"Balls of Fire – Red".*

"The papers dealing with the above subject which you enclosed with your memo SHAEF Air/TS. 37153/A2 dated 11th February, have been carefully examined and discussed with the various other Departments concerned.

Bomber Command crews have for some time been reporting similar phenomena. A few of the alleged aircraft may have been Me

262 and for the rest, flak rockets are suggested as the most likely explanation.

The whole affair is still something of a mystery and the evidence is very sketchy and varied so that no definite and satisfactory explanation can yet be given."[719]

If Grierson had believed that the Americans were experiencing a rather isolated phenomenon, Hopkins' mention of RAF reports must have given him pause. However, the reply referred to "alleged aircraft" and also cited Me 262s as a possible cause of the sightings, but it was believed that *flak* rockets were to blame for most of the cases reported. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that the Germans did not have any operational types of surface-to-air missile that could have accounted for such sightings. As far as the 415th, XII Tactical Air Command and the First Tactical Air Force were concerned, however, this retrograde step did not help front-line units understand what was happening. Their intelligence staff had done their duty in reporting the phenomenon, and it should have been up to scientists and technical branch personnel to try and fathom out just what was going on. However, the British Air Ministry appeared unconcerned, writing reports off as jet aircraft or *flak* rockets. However, even though the war in Europe only had less than two months still to run, the sightings and squadron reports continued. Air Commodore Grierson duly wrote to First Tactical Air Force echoing what Group Captain Hopkins had told him. It seemed like this was the end of the road for the official investigation in terms of what information was already to hand. Only the discovery of information by the CIOS or USSTAF ATI teams could now progress things further.

A new term, "foo fire" was being used by the Italian-based night-fighter units in March 1945, and the 414th NFS unit historian was quick to use this in his daily reports. On the 13th, *"near Bologna, foo fire was observed by the P-61A Black Widows crewed by Lt Schaeffer and Lt Ayres, plus Lt Price and F/O Wilkinson."*[720] At 1940 hours, Schaeffer reported having seen *"100 balls of orange*

light”, which lit up the whole area in the vicinity of his aircraft. Price and his radar operator saw two *“balls of foo fire”* some 15 miles south-west of Bologna. The new name had clearly been adopted by the squadron.

The 64th FW intelligence report for 17th March 1945 lists a highly strange object that was spotted in the sky near Rastatt. Although the unit and pilot involved was not mentioned, an *“object resembling small parachute approximately two foot in diameter, with black ribs trailing wire approx. 5 feet long, 5 miles E of Rastatt at 1200 hours at 9500 feet.”* One of the Wing’s day fighter squadrons was the source of this report.[721] The description does not fit any of the known German secret weapon projects, and it is impossible to say with any certainty what it could have been.

The 416th NFS were continuing to see strange lights in the skies over northern Italy in the middle of March 1945. On the 18th, a Mosquito crew were patrolling an area about 25 miles north-west of Florence. A light suddenly appeared and started to pace them. The radar observer had nothing at all on his scope, even after he had checked his set for possible malfunctions. Radio calls to their Ground Control Intercept station came back with the same answer: *“No contact.”* The light was at around 13,000 feet, and the Mosquito pilot turned to close the distance. The ensuing chase lasted for over half-an-hour, the 416th crew managing to stay on the “tail” of the light as it increased speed to 260 mph and climbed to 16,000 feet. All throughout the chase, the pilot maintained a visual on the light, even though his radar observer still could not obtain a contact on it with his own radar set, despite its close proximity. The pursuit ended abruptly as the mysterious light simply vanished.[722]

With the weather on 18th March having prevented missions in the squadron’s normal hunting grounds along the Po Valley, the 414th NFS sent Lt. Rhett Martin and Lt. Russell Bunker out on a “rear area patrol”, that is a defensive flight behind the American front lines, hoping to catch any *Luftwaffe* intruders hoping to find targets of opportunity. The crew did not see any enemy aircraft, but instead reported seeing *“one huge ball of foo fire”*, although the daily record

does not state where the sighting took place. Three nights later, more strange lights were spotted by the crews of Lt. Evans and F/O Campion, Lt. Baker and Lt. Brown, and Lt. Frank Weaver and F/O Stanley Kalan, although by now the unit's records officer was stating that they *"saw nothing more exciting than foo fire."*

The 422nd NFS were still tangling with what they believed to be rocket-powered interceptors in the night skies of Germany during March 1945. According to their unit historian:

"Herman and the Mouse tangled with a Me 163, chasing it from 7,000 to 19,000 feet, firing whenever opportunity was afforded. But it finally got away."

According to the operations report, on 19th March the crew had witnessed the following near Koblenz:

"[Crew] made a visual on a jet (Me 163) in the Koblenz area at 0130, went into dogfight at Angels 7 [7,000 feet], both aircraft in tight spirals. Two bursts were fired at the jet with unobserved results. Enemy a/c finally broke off to the E."[723]

"Herman" was Lt. Herman Ernst, flying P-61A-5 42-5544 *Lady Gen* on that particular mission. His observer and radio operator was 2/Lt. Edward Kopsel. The squadron operations summary for the same night lists the mysterious aircraft as a "jet", not a Me 163.[724] A *Komet* pilot, and by the same token, a Me 262 night-fighter pilot, would not have put themselves into a potentially losing situation by entering into a dogfight flying something that was unsuited for such engagements. Both machines were optimised for high-speed passes, firing only a few tens of rounds before blasting past their targets and climbing away out of retaliatory fire range.

Whatever was encountered by the crew near Koblenz, it certainly was not a *Komet*. The location was too far away from the Me 163 operating base at Brandis for even a daytime engagement to have taken place. Notwithstanding the fact they did not fly in the dark, the

only time one would have been flying at 7,000 feet would have been during its initial climb to reach the American combat “boxes” of bombers, and again during its glide back to base once the fuel ran out. Me 163 pilots did not have the luxury of descending and then turning the power on and zoom climbing to altitude. In addition, the type demonstrated the fastest climb rate for any aircraft in the world at that time, around 16,000 feet per minute under full rocket power. A P-61 Black Widow pilot would have watched a *Komet* leave him behind extremely quickly in any type of powered ascent. According to the daily operations report that included details of the encounter, *“both aircraft were in tight spirals.”* Neither the *Komet* nor its jet-propelled stablemate, the Me 262, were suited to flying the type of tight turns that were needed in a close-in dogfight, due to their high speeds. The Ar 234 *Blitz* bomber would have been incapable of such manoeuvres, and the single-engined He 162 *Volksjäger* had yet to enter service with the *Luftwaffe.* A Me 262 would have been particularly vulnerable to attack in an engagement such as the one described in the 422nd operations report, and an experienced pilot would have simply opened up his throttles (albeit gingerly to avoid engine fires) and sped off in a single direction to escape.

Part of a report issued by the 422nd NFS at the same time, subtitled “Enemy Aircraft Encountered”, dealt with the unit’s encounters with “jets”:

“Have been unable to determine mission, as they generally fly at altitudes in excess of 10,000 feet and make no effort to attack ground targets or our own aircraft. Possibly they are watching out for mass RAF raids.”

It seemed strange that *Luftwaffe* aircraft would not engage the enemy, and flying standing patrols was a profligate use of fuel that the Germans simply could not afford at that stage of the war. Their stocks were almost exhausted and such missions could never have been carried out. These sightings were at night, and little more than lights in the sky travelling at high speed, with the assumption made that they must be jet aircraft. Whether or not these sightings were in

fact more of the same mysterious lights that had been encountered since the previous October is unknown.

The 415th NFS added to their tally of strange sightings on the night of 19/20th March. According to the mission report, the crew of a P-61 Black Widow flying over Speyer in western Germany *"saw 2 'Foo-Fighters' – 1 orange ball and 1 green one"*. The pilot believed that one of them seemed to be closing in on their aircraft from the port side, and he chose to evade them. After a series of turns, the lights disappeared.[725]

At around 0130 hours on the morning of the 20th, Lt. Martin and Lt. Bunker from the 414th NFS were patrolling north of Florence when they spotted a set of lights. Ground Control Intercept radar had no plot on the target, and at no point in the report was an enemy aircraft identified. The crew were simply chasing lights which suddenly went out as they closed in:

"Lt. Martin and Lt. Bunker got a contact dead ahead at 20,000 feet. They closed to 6,000 feet and at that point the bogey took evasive action and dove. Patrol pulled up from chase when in the mountains and lost contact at a range of 2,000 feet. The bogey had been flying with lights on until patrol closed, and then it blacked out. Canine [GCI] *reported all the time that they had no plot on the bogey."*[726]

P-61A-5 42-5544 *Lady Gen* had taken off at 0028 hours on "Mission Y21-11" on 20th March 1945 for a defensive patrol along the First Army's front line along the River Rhein, again with "Herman and the Mouse" onboard. The 422nd NFS's war diary listed the incident as follows:

"Closed to a visual and identification of a Me 163 which was engaged at angels 6½ [6,500 feet], 20 miles north east of Koblenz. One burst was fired from 1,000 feet, but no results were observed. The jet then took off to the E. This is the 2d night a jet has been encountered in the same area at 0130 hours."[727]

The two reports involving the crew from the 19th and 20th are almost identical. Whatever "the Mouse" was firing at some 330 yards away was clearly not a *Komet*, even though a visual sighting was recorded. A Me 163 would not have been flying in the dark at all, never mind one at least 200km from its base at Brandis. Something that looked like one, perhaps a fiery glow or just a very fast moving bright light, had been mistaken for the diminutive interceptor on at least three separate nights that month.

The 422nd NFS War Diary also has an entry regarding another crew, known only as "Sack" and "Gentleman Jim", who also encountered a "Me 163" at about this time. The mysterious "jet" appeared in roughly the same location near Koblenz, and the crew of the P-61 *"pretty much knocked themselves out trying to get it, but to no avail."*[728] The squadron diarist did his best to try and insert some humour into the situation:

"However, ye wee Jettie did leave for a healthier locality after the second night, so whatever its purpose was, we made him do it elsewhere."[729]

Whoever was writing up the 415th NFS's March war diary was tiring of the "Foo-Fighter" reports, as the following reports and locations were not listed in the unit's war diary. The entry for the 21st read:

"Nothing more exciting than foo fire was reported by other crews who patrolled the Florence-Bologna front line areas: Lt Evans and F/O Campion, Lt Baker and Lt Brown, Lt Weaver and F/O Kalan."[730]

One of the 422nd NFS crews was chasing aircraft that could not have been there on the night of 22nd March 1945. Lt. Anderson and Lt. Mogan took off at 2056 hours in P-61 42-5543 *Tennessee Ridge Runner* to patrol a triangle bordered by Limburg, Giessen and Siegen, towns located north-west of Frankfurt-am-Main. They reported the following:

"Encountered a Me 262 at Angels 4 NW of Frankfurt, head on and below. Orbited in tight turns with jet, finally getting on target's tail at Angels 1-1/2, but then jet broke away by climbing."[731]

However, according to *Luftwaffe* records, 10./NJG 11 only had three Me 262s up that evening, all committed to attacking a force of 56 Mosquitoes that were raiding Berlin.[732] As already stated, the jet night-fighters were exclusively retained for defence of Berlin against the Light Night Striking Force. It is unclear which unit a Me 262 operating north-west of Frankfurt at night could have belonged to. These fighters did not get into dogfights in any case, as they would have been at an immediate tactical disadvantage, as the Me 262 was more optimised for speed than manoeuvrability.

However, the events of the night of 23rd March 1945 seemed to change the mood of the 414th NFS unit historian, at least as far as "foo fire" was concerned. Lt. Gravel and F/O Moore were detailed to fly an intruder mission over the Bergamo and Ghedi area, taking off from Pontedera in the early evening. The diary entry read as follows:

"At 2015 hours, 1,500 ft over Casimoro, they both observed two spurts of gun fire on the ground, and immediately afterwards, two balls of foo fire appeared about 600 yards dead ahead of their ship. [The Americans called their aircraft 'ships'.] Forty-five minutes later, the experience was repeated at another point, excepting that instead of burning out after three or four minutes, one of the balls burst like a projectile while the other continued to glow."

Five other crews who were out on operations that night also reported seeing "foo fire".[733]

The 422nd NFS crews were out chasing suspected "jets" again on the night of 26th March 1945. Just east of the Rhein, the pilot and radar observer assigned to P-61A-10 42-5579, who had taken off at 1927 hours, *"made a chase to Angels 26 on jets, but no contact was made."*[734] Given that it would have been dark when the abortive chase was underway, it is unknown what fast-moving aircraft these

could have been. It was the last such report issued by the 422nd. As the number of their missions reduced in April 1945 due to the rapidly-diminishing area they could operate over, the unit's war was nearly finished.

However, strange *flak* phenomena were still being reported as late as the beginning of April 1945. The 64th FW's Operations & Intelligence Summary covering the first day of the month mentioned the following:

"10 bursts of orange coloured balls, no smoke, did not appear to be flak, 4 inches in diameter at 4 feet intervals at 4000 feet, followed flight leader's tail at Meckesheim (R-765805) at 0745 hours."[735]

Reports of *flak* "following" an aircraft were odd indeed, and anti-aircraft shell bursts certainly did not do this after exploding.

A type that could not possibly have been spotted in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations was recorded in the 416th NFS War Diary for 10th April 1945. The following entry appears: *"Lt Skriner saw what appeared to be an Me 163, jet-propelled aircraft. It disappeared before he could give chase."*[736] *Komets* were only ever based in Germany, apart from a small detachment of these rocket-powered interceptors that was briefly based at Venlo in Holland during the late summer of 1944. What did Skriner really see, that looked like the diminutive aircraft? He was never interviewed about his sighting after the war, as he was unfortunately killed in when his Mosquito disintegrated during recovery from a power dive over Rimini during a training flight on 31st May 1945.

The 64th FW Operations & Intelligence Summary for 26th April 1944 includes a brief mention of a 417th NFS crew that saw a possible jet "bogey" in the Ulm-Dillingen area, although no engagement resulted as the P-61 pilot was unable to get on the tail of the mystery machine.[737] Lots of Me 262s were reported by the Wing's day fighter squadrons, but these aircraft were of course not flying at night. Arguably the last sighting of lights during the war in Europe was made over the Pfalzer Wald (Palatinate Forest) in south-

western Germany during the first days of May 1945. A Black Widow crew from the 415th NFS apparently witnessed “five orange balls” as they were carrying out a routine mission. However, there are no further details regarding this case, and it also originates from a somewhat dubious source.[738]

By the beginning of May 1945, the *Luftwaffe* was completely finished as any kind of coherent fighting force on the Western Front. Its units had already pulled out of Italy, and survivors had regrouped in Austria or parts of Bavaria and western Czechoslovakia in order to escape the Allies – and the Russians. The numbers of “Foo Fighter” sightings reported by the USAAF night-fighter units fell away to zero, giving the American crews the distinct impression that what they had been witnessing over the previous nine months were definitely German secret weapons, ones that would be eventually discovered when their operating bases were overrun by ground forces. They believed this would only be a matter of time.

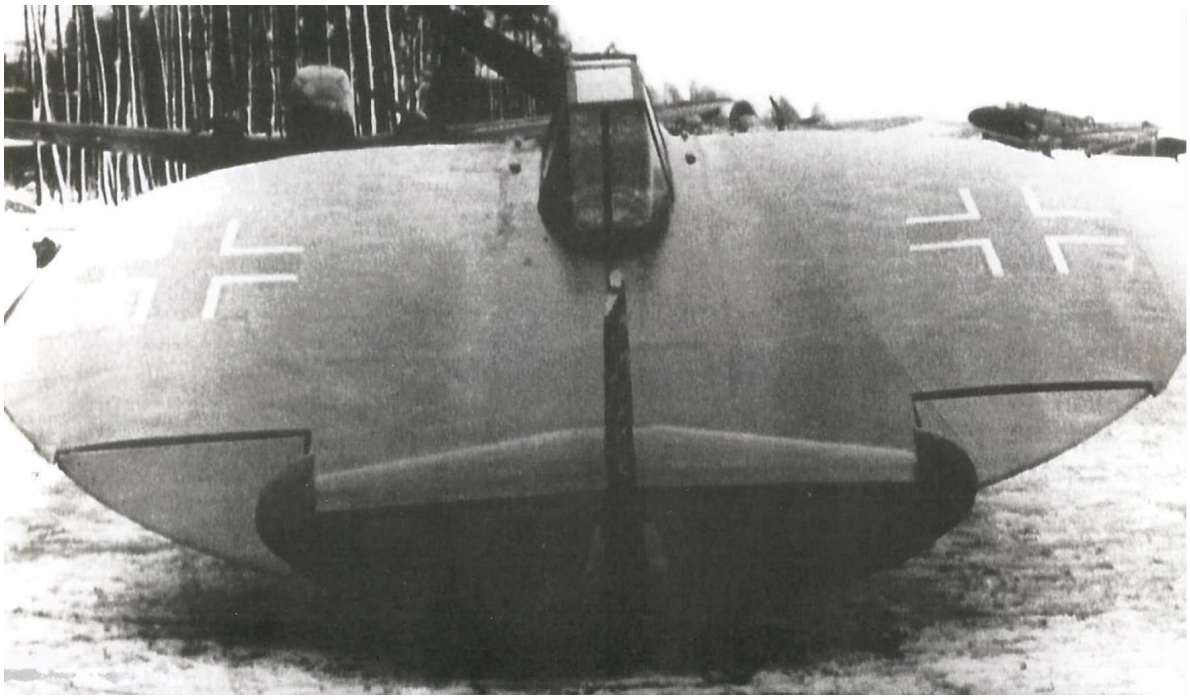
The “Foo Fighters” had left an impression on many aircrew during the winter of 1944/45, but USAAF personnel stationed on the ground were also aware of them. In February 1952, Albert Rosenthal, a former fighter controller serving with the 64th FW, wrote to Air Force Intelligence to provide details about how the “Foo Fighters” were regarded by radar units:

“Flying under our control was the 415th Night Fighter Squadron, flying Beaufighters. When there was no enemy air activities, they would engage in intruder sweeps into south-western Germany. We repeatedly received reports from the Beaufighter crews of similar phenomena, which they named ‘foo-fighters’. At times they seemed to be associated with concentrated flak, and at other times were reported to explode when pursued. It was also asserted that they caused a slight response on Airborne Intercept radar. We never did solve the problem of what they were. Theories propounded included ‘St. Elmo’s Fire’; German barrage balloons; meteors; and gremlins from the Black Forest nearby. And of course we suspected the possibility of some new secret weapon.”[739]

“Exploding when pursued” was a new one, as was a possible, albeit slight indication on AI radar. I cannot recall cases where the mysterious lights or contacts were picked up by the radar observers and their calls to Ground Control Intercept stations inevitably drew a blank. However, some of the night-fighter crews were certainly sent after fast moving contacts which could not be caught, and sometimes these traces apparently “faded in and out” on the scopes of the radar operators. It was all a big mystery, both then and now. Rosenthal’s list of suspected causes was certainly accurate in terms of what was being blamed at the time for the “Foo Fighters”. No-one seemed to have any clue as to what was going on.

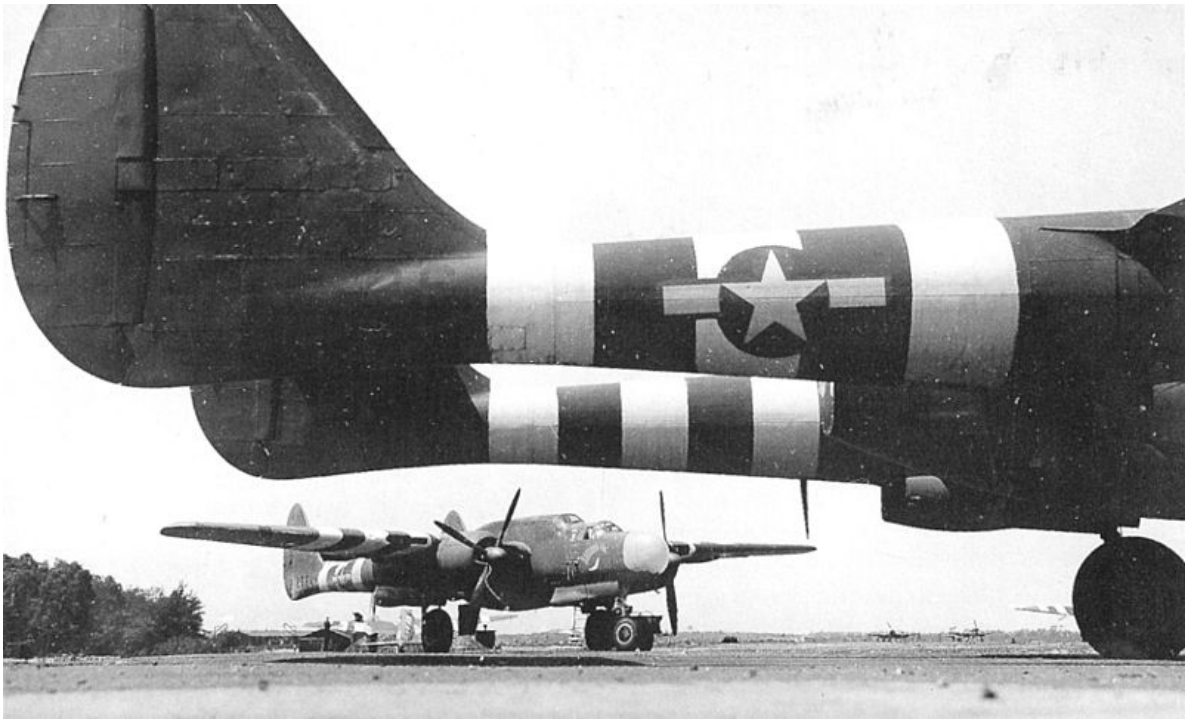
Did the Allied armies, plus the T-Forces that were searching Germany for signs of advanced technology, ever come across anything remotely connected with what had been known as the “Foo Fighters”? We will examine this and possible explanations for the phenomenon in subsequent chapters. Clearly something had been going on in the skies over western Germany, in an area between, but not confined to, Köln, Aachen and the Belgian border, and also along the Po Valley in northern Italy. Were *Luftwaffe flak* units employing a new weapon, one that chased after US night-fighters, even when they undertook violent manoeuvres to try and shake off their unwanted chaperones? To answer this question, we need to turn our attention to the German experience during WW2, and then also look at the secret weapons the Nazis possessed that could possibly have been mistaken for the “Foo Fighters”.

First, however, we need to look at the issue from the other side of the front lines and see whether or not the Germans experienced sightings of their own. Anecdotal evidence has long suggested that *Luftwaffe* pilots saw the “Foo Fighters” and other strange phenomena too, but was that really the case?



(Above) The Sack AS-6 prototype, pictured here at Brandis in 1944. This circular-winged project was abandoned after a number of unsuccessful test flights. It could not have been the source of the “Foo-Fighter” sightings.

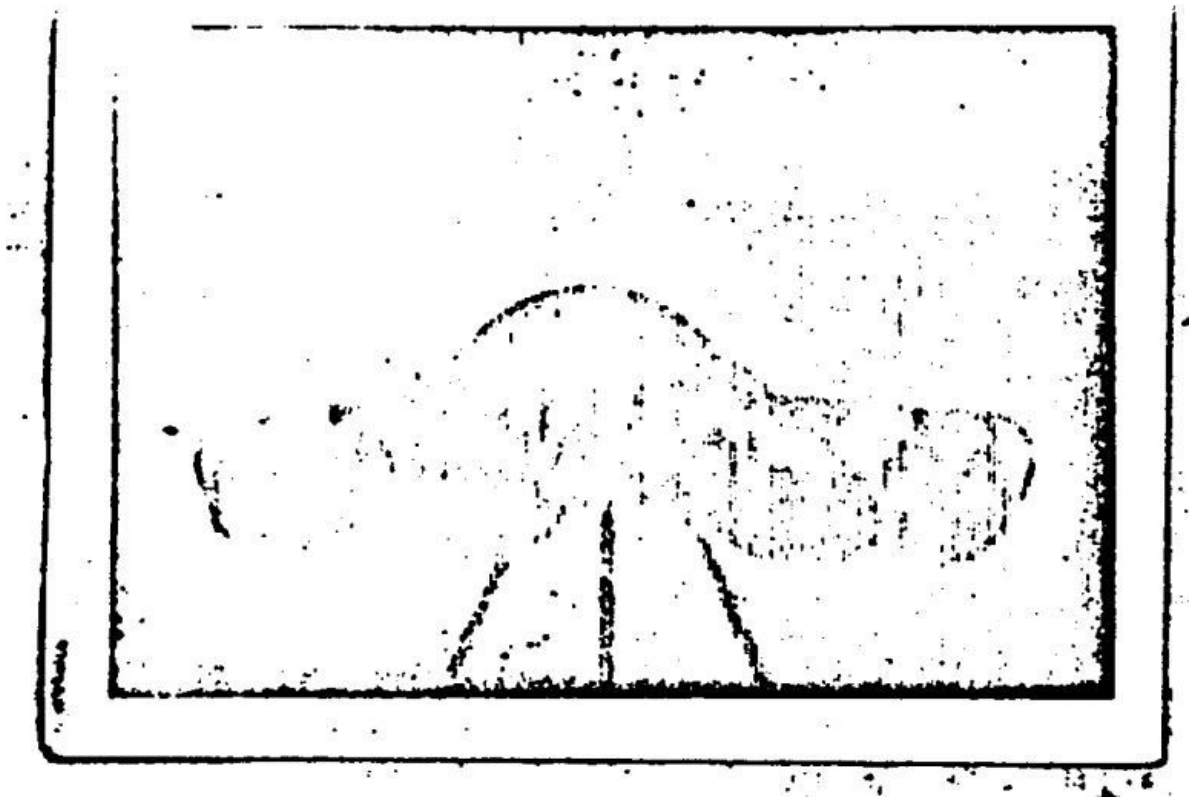
Luftwaffe ground personnel fitting a *Werfer-Granate 21* rocket mortar into a launching tube fitted under the wing of a Focke-Wulf Fw 190A fighter. Note the upward slant of the jettisonable launch tube. These weapons were first used in mid-1943 against B-17 Flying Fortress and B-24 Liberator bombers flying daylight missions over Germany. However, the Wfr.Gr. 21 was never used by the *Luftwaffe* night-fighter force. (Creative Commons licence)



P-61A Black Widows from the 422nd Night Fighter Squadron are pictured here parked at RAF Scorton, North Yorkshire, on 6th June 1944 (D-Day). The unit moved to France in July 1944 and then across to Florennes in Belgium later that year, where their crews started to see what had been nicknamed “Foo Fighters” by a member of the 415th NFS. (USAAF)

Northrop P-61A-5-NO Black Widow 42-5543 *Tennessee Ridge Runner*, one of the aircraft assigned to the 422nd Night Fighter Squadron. Crews from this unit, plus those from the 415th NFS which also flew missions over western Germany in late 1944 and early 1945, frequently reported having encountered lights that followed their machines and “jets” which could not have been seen when and where they were reported. Eventually a report was sent up the chain of command but despite an investigation, no-one in Air Intelligence could determine the origin of these items. Further attempts to solve the mystery were made after the war, but to no avail. (USAAF)

The Schnittke flying disc design, complete with rocket motors on its rotor tips, as pictured in the German weekly magazine *Die Strasse* on 9th April 1950. A remote-controlled weapon which was to be steered into the middle of bomber formations before exploding, no evidence has ever been found to support its existence beyond its inclusion in that publication.



This Xerox copy of a negative was given to the Miami FBI Office as “proof” that its owner had worked on a German flying disc somewhere in Austria during 1944. The alleged machine was saucer-shaped with twenty one jet engines mounted around its circumference. Although the FBI passed the man’s story to a number of agencies in America for follow-up action, it is extremely unlikely that his story was true.

"Meteor" projectile

This phenomenon was reported by a number of aircrews in the approximate area Aachen-Verviers - 12 miles S.W. of Spa-Aachen on the night of 11-12 August, 1942. Although it has only once been reported since and should therefore strictly be classified as an isolated "freak", the interest it aroused warrants the inclusion of a description of its behavior.

A bright white light rose from the ground to 8,000 feet, where it flew approximately level for about two minutes; a few crews reported that it appeared to zigzag along the ground before taking off in a climbing turn. Brilliant white periodic bursts occurred which may have caused a change of course; some crews thought that it subdivided when the bursts took place. Other crews thought that it flew on a circular course, the radius of which was about one mile. Burning pieces were shed from it like a meteor. The color eventually faded to orange and the object was last seen heading toward the ground where some crews thought that it burst on impact. The display lasted about five minutes.

Owing to the scarcity of information about this phenomenon, which may well have been in the nature of an experiment, it is difficult to submit an explanation. It is possibly a miniature aircraft structure carrying a number of rockets and an explosive charge. Its changes of course are probably predetermined, radio control being thought improbable owing to the cost of production, the small chance of directing such a projectile on to a bomber, and the fact that it would be virtually impossible to bring it in to land intact by night.

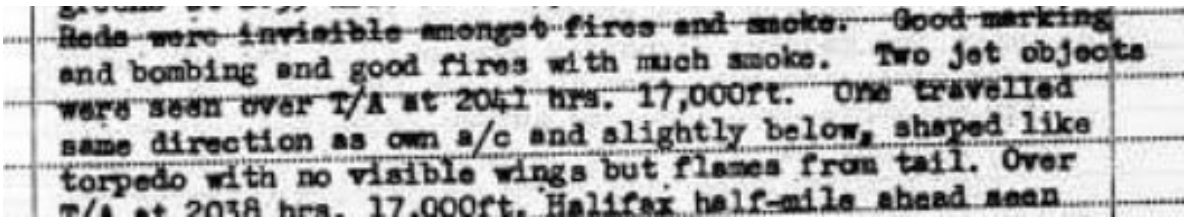
Flashless bursts

The existence of a strictly flashless burst is doubted by technical opinion, since reduction or obscuring of the flash could only be effected at the expense of the efficiency of the burst and consequently would probably not be thought worth while. Reports of this type of burst have been very numerous, however, and several explanations are set forth in the Intelligence Summary mentioned above.

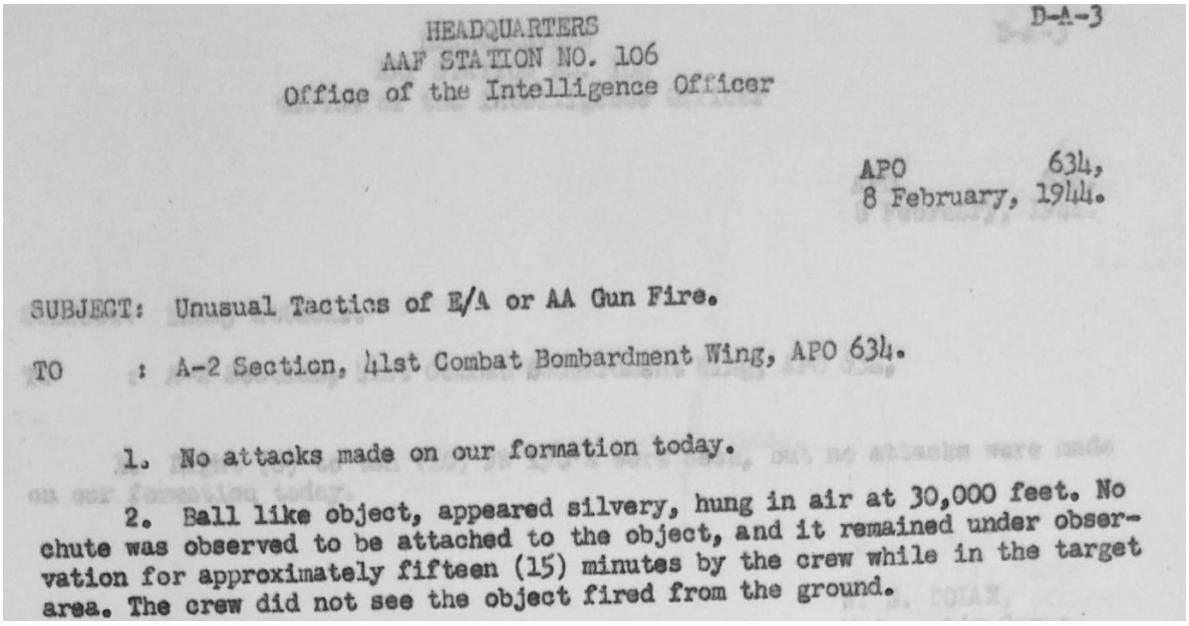
-oOo-

CONFIDENTIAL

Strange “meteor” projectiles were discussed in an RAF intelligence report covering the events of August 1942. These objects would soon be called “rockets” and then “jets”. Devices that rose from the ground to the level of the bombers, then turned and followed them on parallel courses were seen throughout the war by numerous crews. (AFHRA)


Reds were invisible amongst fires and smoke. Good marking and bombing and good fires with much smoke. Two jet objects were seen over T/A at 2041 hrs. 17,000ft. One travelled same direction as own a/c and slightly below, shaped like torpedo with no visible wings but flames from tail. Over T/A at 2038 hrs. 17,000ft. Halifax half-mile ahead seen

An excerpt from the No.61 Sqdn ORB for February 1945, covering a raid on Worms in the Rhineland area of Germany. This sighting was made by the crew of Halifax Mk.III MZ403/NP-G. Me 262 jet night-fighters did not operate over that area of Germany during WW2. (The National Archives)



HEADQUARTERS
AAF STATION NO. 106
Office of the Intelligence Officer

D-A-3

APO 634,
8 February, 1944.

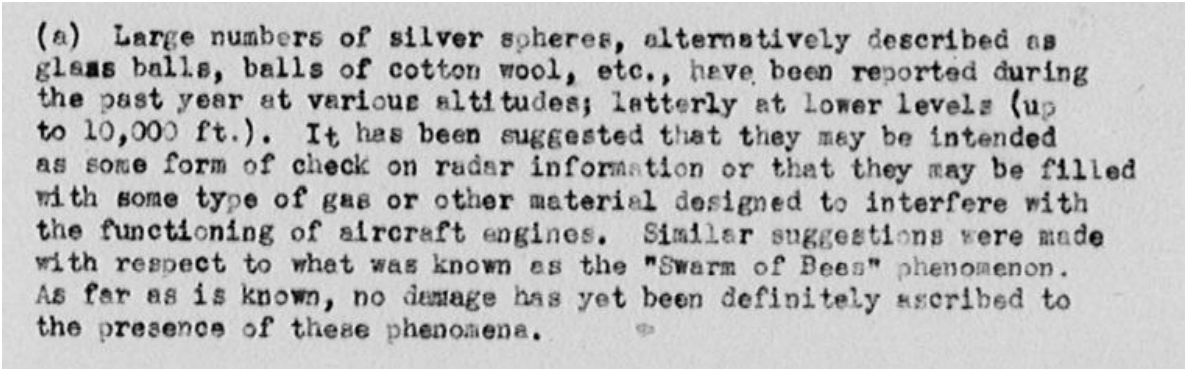
SUBJECT: Unusual Tactics of E/A or AA Gun Fire.

TO : A-2 Section, 41st Combat Bombardment Wing, APO 634.

1. No attacks made on our formation today.

2. Ball like object, appeared silvery, hung in air at 30,000 feet. No chute was observed to be attached to the object, and it remained under observation for approximately fifteen (15) minutes by the crew while in the target area. The crew did not see the object fired from the ground.

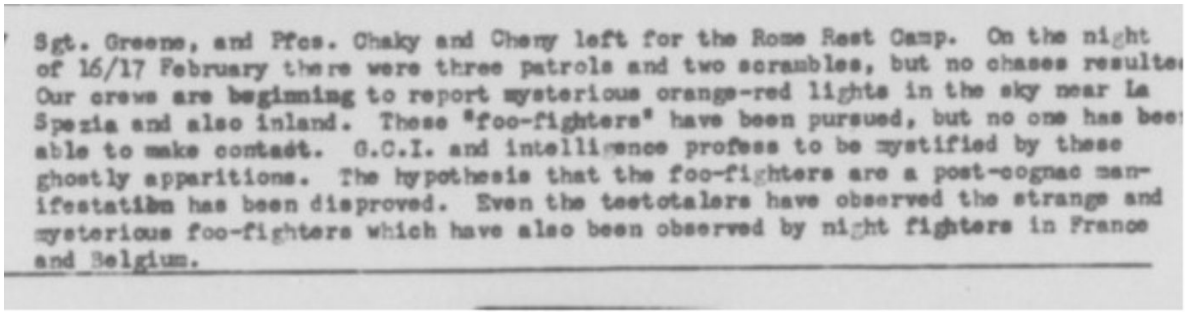
A USAAF intelligence memo dated 8th February 1944 mentioning a “silver ball” reported by a crew from the 384th Bomb Group. This mysterious object was seen to hang in the air for around fifteen minutes. (AFHRA)



(a) Large numbers of silver spheres, alternatively described as glass balls, balls of cotton wool, etc., have been reported during the past year at various altitudes; latterly at lower levels (up to 10,000 ft.). It has been suggested that they may be intended as some form of check on radar information or that they may be filled with some type of gas or other material designed to interfere with the functioning of aircraft engines. Similar suggestions were made with respect to what was known as the "Swarm of Bees" phenomenon. As far as is known, no damage has yet been definitely ascribed to the presence of these phenomena.

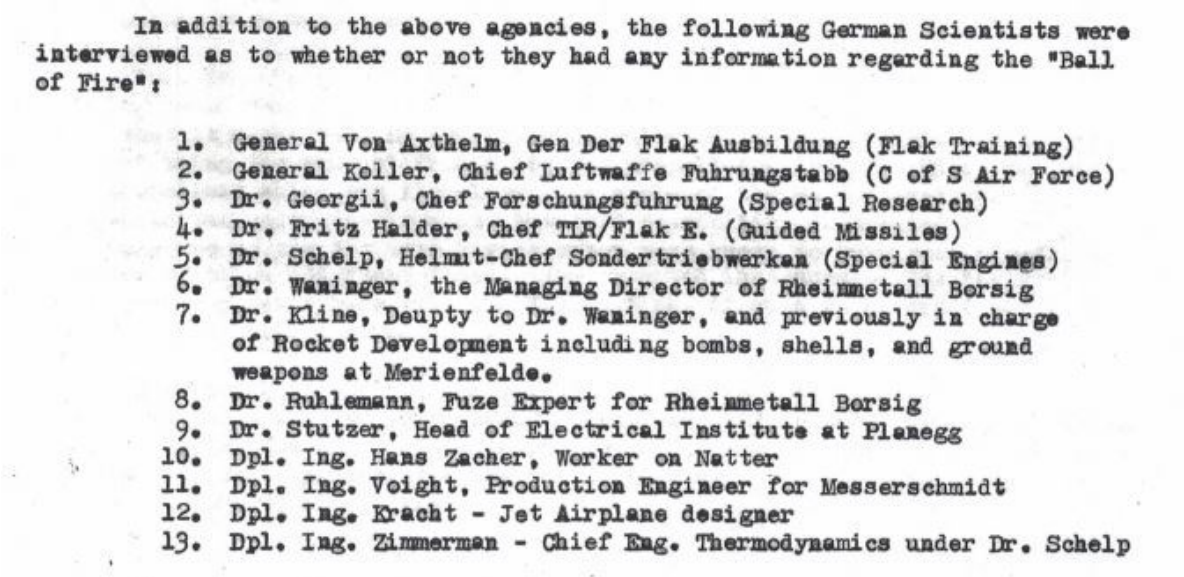
Part of a January 1945 *Consolidated Flak Report* that mentioned both the “silver balls” and “swarm of bees” witnessed by many

American bomber crews flying over Germany since late 1943. (AFHRA)



Sgt. Greene, and Pfcs. Chaky and Cheny left for the Rome Rest Camp. On the night of 16/17 February there were three patrols and two scrambles, but no chases resulte Our crews are beginning to report mysterious orange-red lights in the sky near La Spezia and also inland. These "foo-fighters" have been pursued, but no one has bee able to make contact. G.C.I. and intelligence profess to be mystified by these ghostly apparitions. The hypothesis that the foo-fighters are a post-cognac manifestation has been disproved. Even the teetotalers have observed the strange and mysterious foo-fighters which have also been observed by night fighters in France and Belgium.

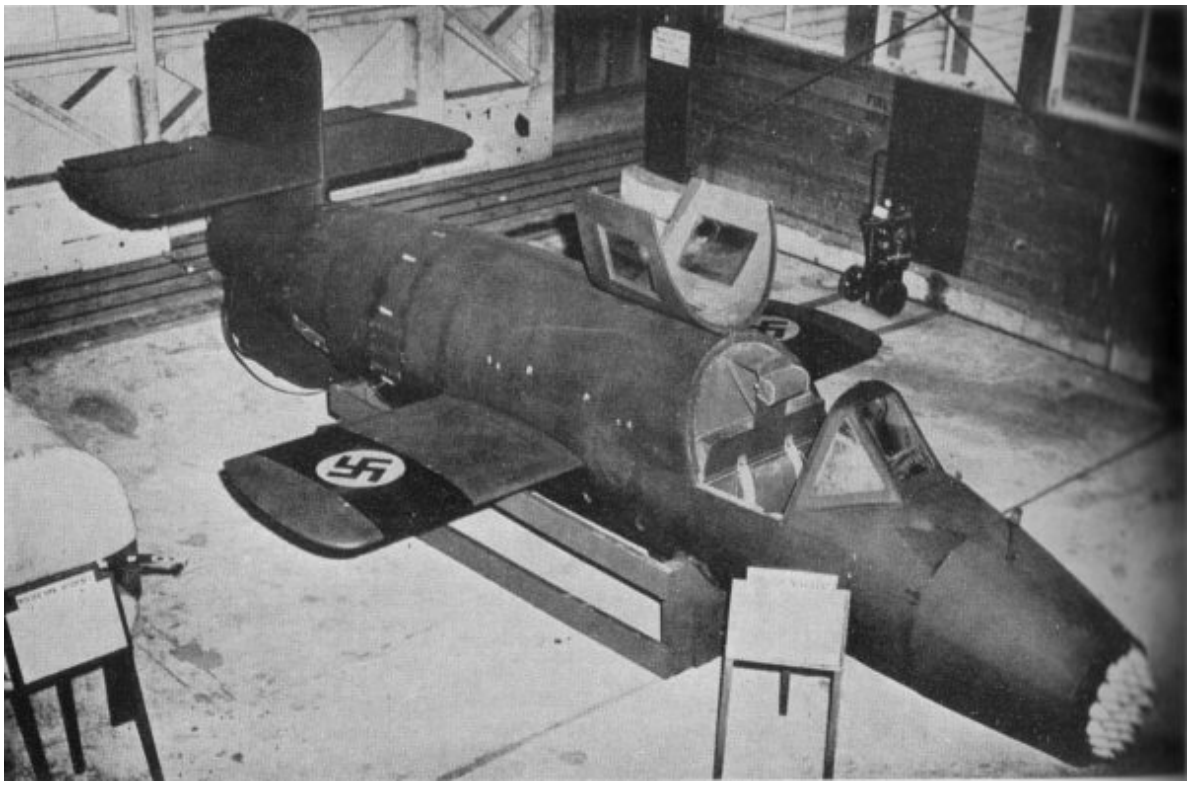
An excerpt from the 416th Night Fighter Squadron's February 1945 War Diary referencing the "Foo Fighters". The nickname, coined in Belgium in November 1944 by a member of the 415th, had spread as far as American units based in Italy by this time. (AFHRA)



In addition to the above agencies, the following German Scientists were interviewed as to whether or not they had any information regarding the "Ball of Fire":

1. General Von Axthelm, Gen Der Flak Ausbildung (Flak Training)
2. General Koller, Chief Luftwaffe Fuhrungstabb (C of S Air Force)
3. Dr. Georgii, Chef Forschungsfuhrung (Special Research)
4. Dr. Fritz Halder, Chef TLR/Flak E. (Guided Missiles)
5. Dr. Schelp, Helmut-Chef Sondertriebwerkan (Special Engines)
6. Dr. Waninger, the Managing Director of Rheinmetall Borsig
7. Dr. Kline, Deupty to Dr. Waninger, and previously in charge of Rocket Development including bombs, shells, and ground weapons at Merienfelde.
8. Dr. Ruhlemann, Fuze Expert for Rheinmetall Borsig
9. Dr. Stutzer, Head of Electrical Institute at Planegg
10. Dpl. Ing. Hans Zacher, Worker on Natter
11. Dpl. Ing. Voight, Production Engineer for Messerschmidt
12. Dpl. Ing. Kracht - Jet Airplane designer
13. Dpl. Ing. Zimmerman - Chief Eng. Thermodynamics under Dr. Schelp

An excerpt from an American report dated September 1945 regarding the questioning of high-ranking *Luftwaffe* officers and German scientists about the wartime “ball of fire” phenomenon. They were unable to provide any useful information with which to solve the mystery. (AFHRA)



Painted in spurious markings, this Bachem Ba 349 *Natter* rocket-powered vertical take-off interceptor is pictured at Freeman Field, Indiana, in September 1945. None of the machines built ever wore national insignia. 36 *Natters* were constructed, but it is not known which one this was. For internal testing purposes, the USAAF referred to it as “Unit 2”. Shortly after the war, the type was suggested as an explanation for the “Foo Fighters”, but it never flew operationally or was tested at night. The single manned test flight in March 1945 ended in disaster for the pilot. (Copyright expired.)

One of the many photographs purporting to show “Foo Fighter” flying in close proximity to American bombers during WW2. These B-17s belonged to the 384th Bomb Group, stationed at Grafton Underwood in Britain. The original image has been manipulated to include a couple of strange lights.

This is the original image, without the “Foo Fighters” included. If new images were to be suddenly released today, it might be difficult to tell if they were real, unless one can locate the original image that was doctored.

GINE - LIRE 20 — ULTIMISSIMA

D'ITALIA

SABATO 25 MARZO 1950
ANNO XLIX NUM. 72

I DISCHI VOLANTI
furono ideati nel 1942
IN ITALIA E IN GERMANIA

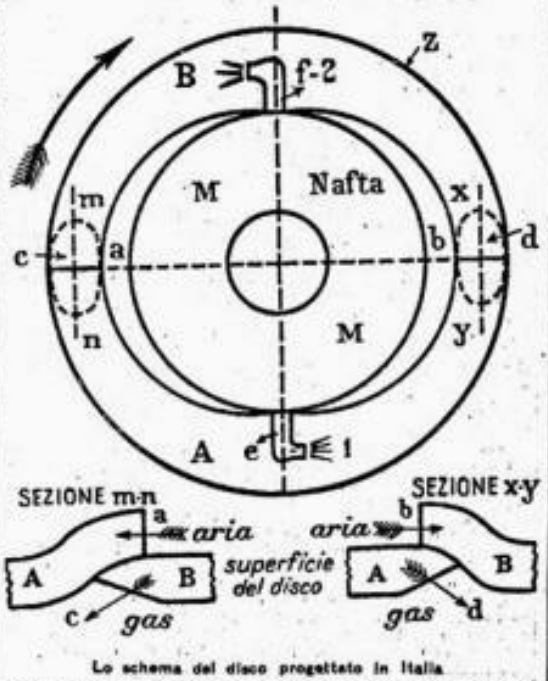
Mussolini e Hitler se ne interessarono - Oggi qualche grande potenza sta utilizzando l'arma a scopo di studio

Il mondo è oggi posto a rumore dalla notizia della, secondo alcuni presunta e secondo altri constatata, esistenza dei cosidetti dischi volanti che hanno fatto lavorare la fantasia di coloro i quali, non conoscendo i progressi e le nuove possibilità della tecnica, hanno sollevato dei dubbi sulla possibile esistenza di questi nuovi istrumenti di distruzione.

La verità vera è che questi istrumenti di distruzione si possono costruire e fare funzionare, e che di essi già nel 1942 si erano studiati e disegnati in Germania ed in Italia alcuni prototipi nell'intento di fornire alla Patria in guerra uno strumento formidabile per la vittoria. Vittoria che si sarebbe realizzata se la moralità e la competenza di alcuni uomini che oggi vanno per la maggiore, fossero state diverse.

Ma ritorniamo, è il caso di scriverlo, a bomba, giacchè i nuovi istrumenti di guerra potevano allora trasportare, senza pericolo per guidatori che non erano necessarii, cariche di esplosivo di ogni specie e peso, ed oggi bombe atomiche in grado di distruggere intere città anche con dieci chilometri di diametro.

Il principio del disco volante è semplice, e ne è molto



Lo schema del disco progettato in Italia

to simmetricamente disposti rispetto all'asse del disco, hanno una sezione variabile da un minimo ad un massimo. Con

zione della velocità in pressione nel funzionamento a terra si arriva alla pressione di 2, 4 chilogrammi per centimetro

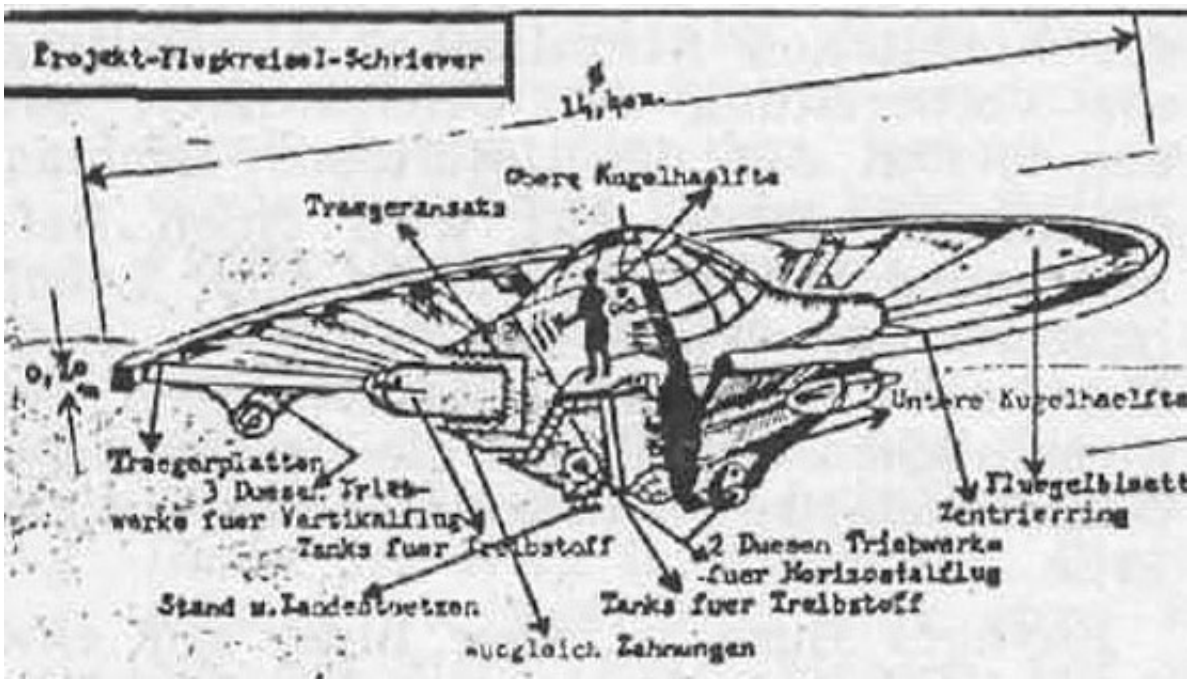
400 metri al secondo alla periferia, il disco volante e nello stesso tempo grazie ad una studiata inclinazione delle bocche c e d di efflusso dei condotti A e B genera una spinta verso l'alto in modo da provocare il moto ascensionale del disco ruotante, il quale percorre pertanto un'elica cilindrica, spostandosi nello spazio a grandissima velocità.

L'iniezione della nafta nella sezione massima dei condotti A e B ha luogo per effetto della forza centrifuga cui il combustibile è assoggettato, per effetto della rotazione del disco, nel condotto anulare collegato al disco stesso che lo contiene. Questo condotto anulare nella figura annessa è indicato con M e con e ed 1 sono indicati schematicamente gli iniettori che comunicano con il serbatoio della nafta.

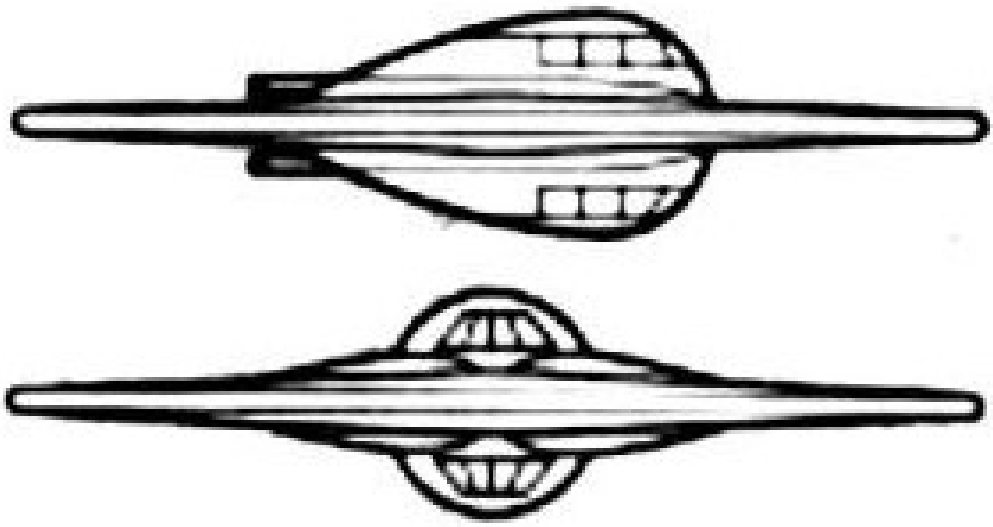
La partenza da terra del disco volante avviene con la accensione e combustione rapida di una cartuccia analoga, salvo le maggiori dimensioni, a quella che provoca l'azionamento dei siluri nella marina, cartuccia posta nelle sezioni di scarico dei due condotti A e B. La combustione della cartuccia provoca il moto rotatorio e

Il Giornale d'Italia, 25th March 1950: "*Flying Saucers were designed in 1942 in Italy and Germany".* An Italian engineer, Giuseppe

Belluzzo (spelt as “Bellonzo” in some books) claimed he worked on a flying disc in 1942 but the plans had been passed to the Germans, who perfected his design. The article spawned several copycat pieces by alleged designers of flying discs in Germany during WW2. None provided any actual evidence of their work, and their stories are likely to be hoaxes.



Rudolf Schriever's *Flugkreisel* ("Flying Top"), allegedly designed in either 1941 or 1942 depending on the source used. This image appeared in the 30th March 1950 edition of the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, possibly in response to Giuseppe Belluzzo's article printed in *Il Giornale d'Italia* five days earlier. Schriever provided conflicting accounts of how his blueprints went missing at the end of the war. It is unlikely that such a machine was constructed, as no actual evidence has ever been produced.



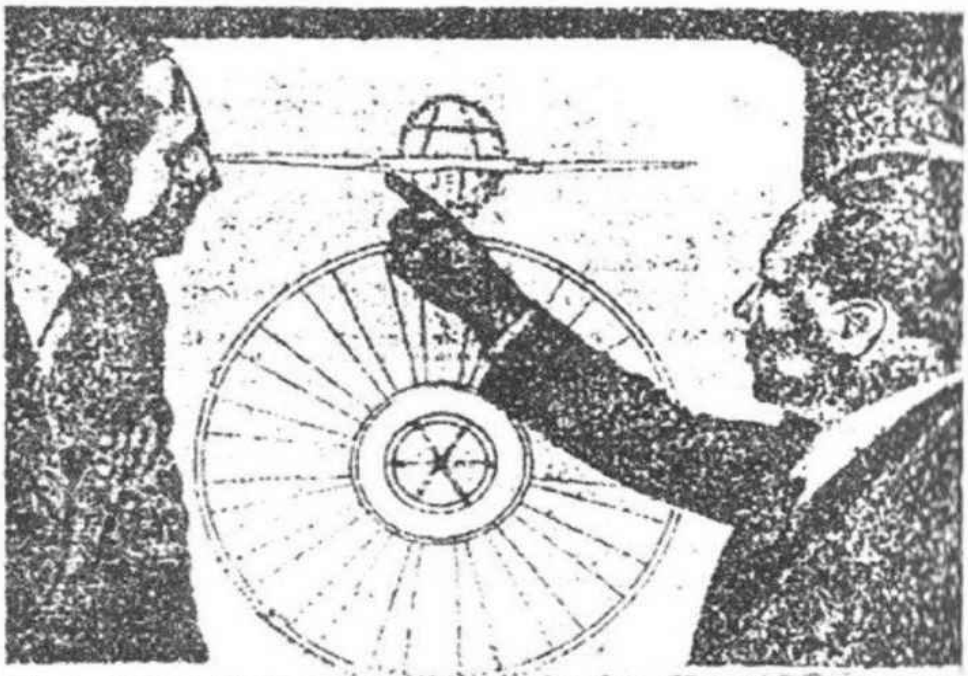
Plan and front view drawings of the alleged Miethe flying disc, which some have suggested was designated as the “V-7”. According to the myth that has built up around this device, it is supposed to have been test flown in February 1945. In all likelihood, it never existed in the first place.

Overleaf: The 26th April 1953 edition of *Welt am Sonntag* included an article featuring Georg Klein, who claimed to have first-hand knowledge of several secret wartime flying disc projects, although without actual proof.

Erste „Flugscheibe" flog 1945 in Prag

— enthüllt Speers Beauftragter

Interview unseres wissenschaftlichen Mitarbeiters Dr. WERNER KELLER mit Oberingenieur GEORG KLEIN



OBERINGENIEUR GEORG KLEIN (rechts) ERKLÄRT UNSEREM MITARBEITER DR. WERNER KELLER (links) DIE KONSTRUKTIONSSKIZZE DER „FLUGSCHEIBE" VON 1945

Foto: Weiß

Hamburg, 25. April

Die Nachrichten aus Kanada beweisen, daß es sich bei den „Fliegenden Untertassen" nicht um Phantasieprodukte handelt. Wie hier bekannt wird, hat diese Entwicklung im Flugwesen während des letzten Krieges auch schon in Deutschland eingesetzt. Die WELT am SONNTAG stellt ihren Lesern den deutschen Experten vor, der als Augenzeuge den ersten Start einer bemannten Flugscheibe erlebt hat. Es ist Herr Oberingenieur Georg Klein, ehemaliger Sonderbeauftragter des Reichsministeriums Speer.

Frage: *Hat nach Ihrer Ansicht durch den jetzt gemeldeten Bau „Fliegender Untertassen" eine neue flugtechnische Entwicklung begonnen?*

Oberingenieur Klein: Für den Fachmann handelt es sich hierbei keineswegs um eine ganz neue Entwicklung. Konstruktionen dieser Art wurden während des letzten Krieges zumindest auch in Deutschland bereits als Versuchsmuster entwickelt. Ich selbst war am 14. Februar 1945 in Prag Augenzeuge des ersten Starts einer bemannten Flugscheibe. Diese Versuchsmaschine erreichte im Steigflug eine Höhe von 12 400 m innerhalb von drei Minuten und entwickelte im Geradeausflug eine Spitzengeschwindigkeit von 2 200 km in der Stunde. Bei diesem ersten Probeflug wurde also nahezu die doppelte Schallgeschwindigkeit erreicht. Das mag erstaunlich klingen; praktisch lassen sich aber mit diesem Scheibentyp auf Grund seiner geradezu idealen aerodynamischen Form sogar Geschwindigkeiten von 4000 km/st und mehr erzielen.

Frage: *Solche hohen Geschwindigkeiten bringen doch sicherlich fast unlösbare technische Schwierigkeiten mit sich*

(Fortsetzung Seite 14)

Chapter 7:
Luftwaffe Involvement?

It seemed to be composed of a large number of rings, the surface of which seemed convex…

> - Alleged sighting of a mysterious object by *Luftwaffe* fighter pilots over Hamburg, 18th December 1943.

Whether or not the Allies believed that the mysterious objects being seen over Occupied Europe were new German secret weapons, reports of similar sightings were also apparently being made by *Luftwaffe* aircrew at the same time. If these reports are to be believed, then the Germans had reached same the conclusion, albeit that the mysterious objects were some kind of new Allied weapon. As we will see, however, the few cases that involve Axis forces lack details that can be fact-checked, and some probably exist only in the minds of whoever came up with them in the first place. At least one involves a hoax, eventually admitted by the perpetrator.

The first case I can find in Germany involved civilians rather than the air force. In 1971, *UFO-nachrichten* reported details of the following case under the title *Leuchtobjekt über Mainz* ("Light object over Mainz"):

"My mother died in August 1941. She spent a lot of the last few nights in the armchair by the window. In doing so, she observed an apparition in the sky that was not a star, a balloon or an airplane, which shone like an orange. During a night watch I also saw this apparition. It stood in the southwestern sky, came and went unnoticed. This experience became the reason why I am a member of the UFO/IFO study group in Wiesbaden."[740]

Military Encounters with Extra-terrestrials: the Real War of the Worlds listed what seemed to be one of the earliest incidents

involving *Luftwaffe* aircraft.[741] The author included a case which featured *Flugkapitän* Hanna Reitsch, the renowned German female test pilot, who was carrying out testing of the world's first rocket-powered fighter. According to the author, Frank Joseph, on 3rd February 1942, the following incident occurred:

"While the still-experimental Messerschmitt 163A V4 was climbing at 525 feet per second to seven and a half miles above the earth, almost straight up into the sky, a silvery, luminous disk shot past her as though the Komet were standing still. It went to sixty thousand feet, twenty-six hundred feet higher than the Messerschmitt's maximum ceiling. The object, without insignia, vanished almost as quickly as it had appeared."

The endnote to this paragraph stated that the details were taken from Reitsch's autobiography *Flying is my Life*, published in 1954. She had written the book in 1951, although it has been reprinted in a number of English and foreign language editions, at least one of the former being retitled *The Sky My Kingdom*. Joseph was very specific in referring to the Me 163A V4. This was the *Versuchs 4*, which under normal circumstances would have been the fourth prototype of the aircraft. However, for security reasons the numbering started at four, the V4 being the initial Me 163A-series prototype, followed by the Me 163 V5, V6 and V7. The V4 first flew as a glider in February 1941 before being taken to *Erprobungsstelle* Peenemünde-West (Karlshagen) to have its Walter rocket motor installed in June of that year. It wore the *Stammkennzeichen* (radio call-sign letters) "KE+SW" and features in a number of photographs taken at the time. The Me 163 V4 made its first rocket-powered flight on 10th February 1941 from the airfield at Peenemünde-West, flown by test pilot Heini Dittmar. On 1st October 1941, it was towed to altitude by a twin-engined Bf 110 fighter and released, Dittmar starting the rocket motor which then propelled the little interceptor to a record-breaking 624 mph (1004 km/h). This record, which of course was not made

public at the time, was not broken until August 1947 when the Douglas D558-1 was test flown.

It was therefore possible that Hanna Reitsch could have piloted the Me 163 V4 on 3rd February 1942. She does include a chapter towards the end of her book about test-flying the Me 163, however it only states that she flew A- and B-series prototypes in October 1942 at Augsburg, where a Messerschmitt factory airfield was located. The B- series prototype would have probably been Me 163 “VD+EK”, built to test the combat version of the *Komet*, a slightly larger aircraft fitted with a different cockpit layout. This machine first flew in June 1942 as a glider and did not fly with the rocket motor installed until twelve months later. Reitsch’s book includes no mention of encountering a large flying disc during her test flights, and nothing at all about flying the Me 163 V4, or any other *Komet*, in February of that year. She does talk about flying unpowered versions of the Me 163 on five separate occasions, the last one ending in the machine landing upturned on the grass runway, causing her to sustain severe head injuries.

Indeed, there is no evidence that Reitsch actually took off in a powered Me 163 *Komet* at any point during the war, which would have been the only way she could have attained the kind of climb rate suggested in Joseph’s book. Indeed, in *The Women Who Flew For Hitler: The True Story of Hitler’s Valkyries*, written by Clare Mulley and published in 2017, it is alleged that when the noted British test pilot Captain Eric “Winkle” Brown questioned Hanna Reitsch after the war about how to start the *Komet’s* Walter rocket engine, she “stammered and stuttered” her answer. Brown was convinced she had only ever flown the rocket-propelled aircraft as a glider.[742] Therefore, the question is, as the information about Reitsch’s alleged encounter clearly was not from the book that Joseph indicated, and what information is available suggests she may not have flown a *Komet* in the manner that he stated, where did he actually obtain the details from? We shall return to some of the details given in Joseph’s book again shortly.

A further mention of Hanna Reitsch encountering a UFO whilst test-flying an early Me 163A *Komet* appears courtesy of the Spanish ACTA website, however the year 1941 is claimed instead. *"The German aviator Hannah Reitsch detects a UFO while conducting a test flight with a prototype of the Messerschmitt Me163 rocket plane. The object is moving at high speed and at about twenty thousand meters of altitude."* However, no source is listed for this information. It is entirely possible that the authors of the book and the website obtained the information from the same source, one I have been unable to locate.[743]

Henry Durrant published details of several sightings made by *Luftwaffe* personnel in his 1970 book *Le Livre noir des soucoupes volantes*, and further examination of these cases reveals some interesting points for discussion. Durrant's first case involved a *Luftwaffe* fighter pilot based at Banak in northern Norway, who on the evening of 14th March 1942, was scrambled to intercept a machine flying silently towards the airfield. Shortly after the alarm was raised at 1735 hours, *Hauptmann* Fischer took off in a Messerschmitt Bf 109 to intercept the intruder. At 3,500 metres, he reached the object and provided his controllers on the ground with a commentary of what he was seeing in the skies above the air base. According to Fischer, the object was apparently enormous:

"A huge, tapered body, without any means of support, without any visible opening, its length is about 100 metres and its diameter about 15 metres, [and] at one end a group of rods resemble radar antennae."

The "aerial whale", as the pilot supposedly described the huge object, maintained horizontal flight until suddenly rising vertically at high speed and disappearing out of sight. A report on the incident was then forwarded to the *Oberkommando der Luftwaffe* (OKL, or "Air Force High Command") in Berlin, counter-signed by the *Kommandant* at Banak. In it, Fischer suggested that the object that he saw could not have been man-made. According to Durrant, when

Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering read the report, he concluded that *"the harsh solitude of the Far North had played a dirty trick on the pilot"*, or in other words, he was seeing things that were not there.[744]

Banak airfield is located at the head of Porsangerfjorden, one of the long fjords that punctuate the northern tip of Norway. Located next to the town of Lakselv, less than forty kilometres from the Finnish border, and 160km from the present-day Russian frontier near Kirkenes, the airbase was taken over by the *Luftwaffe* after the Germans successfully invaded Norway in April 1940. Wood planking runways were quickly laid down at Banak in order to prevent the site from becoming waterlogged during the spring melt. It became a very important centre for operations in northern Norway, both for anti-shipping missions against the Arctic convoys and in support of *Gebirgskorps Norwegen's* offensive towards Murmansk once the attack on Russia began in June 1941. *Fliegerhorst* Banak was placed under the command of *Luftflotte V* ("Air Fleet 5").

The suggestion that a Messerschmitt Bf 109 was involved in the case at Banak at all raises some doubts as to the validity of the story Durrant told. To explain this further, we have to look at the *Luftwaffe* units which were assigned to the air defence of Norway following the invasion in April 1940. The original fighter unit that took on this task was *Jagdgeschwader 77* (JG 77, or "Fighter Wing 77"), with three *Gruppen* ("groups") of three *Staffeln* ("squadrons"), each equipped with a mix of Bf 109E-4 and E-7 aircraft. By May 1941 only I./JG 77 (its 1st *Gruppe*) remained in Norway as the other two *Gruppen* had been transferred to support the invasion of Greece.[745] It was renamed I./JG 5 *Eismeer* ("Ice Sea") in January 1942. Although explanations of *Luftwaffe* units can end up being overly complicated, it does allow us to narrow down the list of Bf 109 units that would have been available for a mission which intercepted a mysterious object off northern Norway on 14th March 1942. The exact variant of Bf 109 involved is also important as it became part of the story in terms of subsequent reporting.

A problem arises due to the reality on the ground in terms of *Luftwaffe* fighter units that were physically based in northern Norway during the late winter and early spring of 1942. According to Werner Girbig, the chronicler of JG 5 *Eismeer* ("Ice Sea"), I./JG 5, which at that time comprised the main fighter strength in the country, could only defend the Norwegian coastline as far north as Trondheim, even though it was officially responsible for the entire coast from Oslo up to the North Cape.[746] The 700 mile-long stretch between Trondheim and Kirkenes was virtually undefended, and this situation remained until January 1942 when 15 Bf 109E-7s of 7./JG 5, commanded by *Hauptmann* Graf von Sponeck, finally arrived at Bodø.[747] This was still 200 miles short of Banak as the crow flies, which would have also involved overflying neutral Swedish territory if a dog-leg were not flown. In any case, von Sponeck's *Staffel* appears to have largely restricted its operations to the Bodø and Narvik areas, providing air cover for the battleship *Tirpitz* during its infrequent sorties into the Arctic Ocean. 7./JG 5 did eventually fly from Banak, but only in mid-April as a transit stop on the way to be based at Petsamo for operations against the Russians. III./JG 5 did not arrive at Kirkenes and Petsamo until April 1942.[748]

This only leaves II./JG 5 unaccounted for. Two of its *Staffeln* (4./ and 5./JG 5) were formed by renaming the existing 4./JG 77 at Alakurtti in northern Finland (now Russia) and 14./JG 77 at Petsamo. 6./JG 5 turned up in March 1942 from Stavanger. The only other Bf 109s in the area would have belonged to JG 5's *Geschwaderstab* ("HQ Flight") which was formed at Petsamo on 25th January 1942. All of the aircraft based at Kirkenes, Petsamo and Alakurtti were, however, committed in support of XX. *Gebirgsarmee* (20th Mountain Army) which was still trying to push towards Murmansk. 4./JG 5 split itself into two parts, the majority remaining at Petsamo, but with one *Schwarm* ("flight") of four Bf 109s being based at Banak[749]. Whilst the airfield was a bomber base first and foremost, it made sense to have a small detachment of fighters there to extend the local air defence network's coverage. However, the available records indicate that the Bf 109s were only stationed at Banak from the summer of

1942, which would put them outside the date in question. If *Hauptmann* Fischer had existed and was actually based in northern Norway, he would have presumably served with 4./JG 5's detached *Schwarm* at Banak, one of just a handful of pilots who were operating Bf 109s there. Unfortunately, Fischer would not have been based there in March 1942.

According to Frank Joseph, Fischer was flying at a height of 39,370 feet in a Messerschmitt Bf 109F-4/Z variant when he encountered the object, not 3500m (11,482 feet).[750] If this was true, then the pilot was flying the specialised high-altitude variant of the standard single-seat Bf 109F-4 fighter fitted with *Goering-Mischung 1* (GM-1) boost. This system, which injected nitrous oxide into the supercharger installed in the Daimler-Benz DB601E engine, increased the fuel flow at the same time and meant that there was more oxygen to burn, therefore more power for the engine. GM-1 was fitted to aircraft that regularly performed high-altitude interceptions against enemy reconnaissance machines. Joseph also stated that the pilot, who was not named in his book, was flying a patrol at high altitude, rather than Durrant's tale of Fischer being scrambled after the UFO was spotted.

I wondered how Joseph had obtained details of the exact variant of aircraft the pilot was flying at the time, as previous published versions of the case only refer to it as a Bf 109. There was also a difference between a silent, unidentified object approaching an airbase and one overflying six miles up. The two versions of the story did not match up. As the service ceiling of the "basic" Bf 109F-4 was 38,000 feet, was Joseph aware of this and therefore had made an assumption that it must have been the high-altitude variant that the pilot was flying that day? If not, where did he get this rather specific piece of information from? JG 5 was still flying the older Bf 109E-7 variant at the time of the alleged sighting, and there is no record of the *Staffel* flying the earlier GM-1 boosted E-7/NZ whilst in Norway. In any case, the "basic" Bf 109F-4s arrived in Norway too late to be considered as part of the Banak case. JG 5 *Eismeer* received a delivery of 20 brand-new Bf 109F-4 fighters in May 1942.

[751] Units based on the Channel coast and the Mediterranean, plus the main Russian fronts, were already beginning to fly the new Bf 109G-series aircraft and therefore relatively new but by then obsolete F-series machines were allocated to quieter areas of the war.

Tracking down the full name of the *Luftwaffe* pilot was always going to present problems, as Fischer is a fairly common German surname. I found around 350 *Luftwaffe* airmen and staff officers sharing that name who had served between 1939 and 1945, but obviously not all of them were pilots, and of the latter, few of them had actually served in Norway. In addition, Fischer's rank of *Hauptmann* strongly implied that he had been a *Staffelkapitän* (the *Luftwaffe* equivalent to an RAF Squadron Leader) or even a *Gruppenkommandeur* (Wing Commander). This also narrowed the search as it implied he may have commanded one of the *Staffeln*. This was of course assuming that the case details as provided were correct and not a hoax. In addition, as a fighter pilot, it was quite likely that *Hauptmann* Fischer would have either gained at least one "kill" or have been shot down, killed, injured, or taken prisoner by the Russians. The records for JG 5 do not mention anyone with that surname in this respect and he is certainly not listed among the various pilots who commanded 4./JG 5.[752] Girbig's comprehensive unit history for JG 5 does not even mention a pilot by the name of Fischer.

In his book *Arma segrata* ("Secret Weapon"), the Italian author Marcello Coppetti had his own idea about what *Hauptmann* Fischer had witnessed back in March 1942. He based his thoughts on the flight characteristics of balloons, which he believed were similar to airships:

"[If] I had to give an opinion, albeit so many years later and with so little material available, I would say that an airship, albeit revolutionary for that time, perhaps a new weapon of the German air forces themselves, has been mistaken by Fischer for a "flying cigar". [753]

I do not subscribe to Coppetti's view, since I do not believe that an airship would have been flying over northern Norway in 1942 due the technology being considered a "dead end". I also have a problem with the Banak case for several reasons. The *Luftwaffe* pilot's full name was not given in the original report nor its numerous subsequent appearances, plus it seems that no-one with that surname served with JG 5, or anywhere in Norway. In addition, the details about a high-altitude interception appear to have been added later, and the aircraft concerned altered to suit the story. If the original core of the report had included verifiable details regarding the pilot's identity, my conclusion may have been different. As such, however, I am unable to lend the alleged Banak sighting any credence whatsoever. I now believe it was concocted at some stage in the post-war period for reasons unknown and took on a life of its own. It would therefore be interesting to learn the origins of the story that Durrant published in 1970.

One final point: it may only be a coincidence that the Rybachy Peninsula, a large "whale's tailfin" shaped piece of land situated in what is now the far north-western extremity of mainland Russia, was also known as the *Fischerhalbensel* ("Fischer Peninsula") by the Germans during WW2. Located north-east of the town of Pechenga, or Petsamo when it was part of Finland between 1920 and 1944, the German name was a translation of its Norwegian name, *Fiskerhalvøya* ("the fishing peninsula"). It was only 170km east of Banak airfield. If, as I strongly suspect, the entire story was made up, then this may be where the German pilot's name originated from.

Compared with the number of known RAF and USAAF sightings, cases involving *Luftwaffe* pilots and crews are few and far between. What details are available appear to be sketchy and often incomplete, especially in terms of the names of witnesses and their units. This information would allow potential investigation and corroboration, but in the absence of such, we are left with the bare bones of the reports and very little else. We have already seen how one of the German cases is in all likelihood a hoax. Bear this in mind when reading the following reports, as there is also a major

falsehood at the heart of something that many commentators have highlighted as showing that “the other side” saw the same strange objects that the Allies were encountering during WW2, which I will examine shortly.

In October 1943, Robert Visarius was a *Luftwaffe* radar officer serving with *Flak-Regiment 103* (also known as *Flakgruppe Kurhessen*), based in the north-east of Kassel, halfway between Düsseldorf and Leipzig. One night that month, whilst using an optical spotting scope normally employed in finding Allied aircraft, Visarius saw a mysterious object that he described as being a *“silvery glittering body”*. Although the FuMG 39 *Würzburg* radar system did not initially pick up the target, it was directed to “look” in that direction and finally tracked the object. Its distance was estimated at about 24 miles (40km) and at an angle of 70°: this meant the target was flying at over 59,000 feet (18000m). Believing that there must have been some sort of fault in the *Würzburg* set, Visarius left the command post to arrange for a back-up system to be activated. As he did so, the object was seen to move away with such speed that the *Luftwaffe* radar technicians were said to be speechless. German night-fighters could not reach that altitude, so no interceptions were possible.

Visarius knew that Allied bombers could not reach that kind of altitude, and the object could not have been a weather balloon as it moved too quickly. He informed his superiors of the contact, and his story was talked about for several days at meetings of the *Flakgruppe*, but they believed he was simply a fantasist, making the story up. After that, the German radar officer simply overlooked any future phenomena that he encountered.[754]

Durrant gave some details of another case, this time involving the pilots of two Focke-Wulf Fw190 single-seat piston-engined fighter aircraft on 18th December 1943. Whilst the origin of this story is unknown, the French author claimed that a strange object had been detected by radar stations located in Heligoland, Hamburg, Wittenberg and Neustrelitz that morning. By plotting the time that the device took to fly between these sites, its average speed was

calculated as 3000km/h, so it was obviously travelling well in excess of anything that the Allied or Axis arsenals had at that time. The pilots of the pair of fighters spotted the object over Hamburg at around 1115 hours. According to their report, it was *"a cylindrical body with a warhead in the front, a large hole in the back with a panel. It seemed to be composed of a large number of rings, the surface of which seemed convex."* The pilots tried to follow the object but could do so only for a few kilometres before it disappeared at high speed.[755]

If the incident actually occurred, the description of this mysterious aerial vehicle does not match any known German or Allied weapon. Test firings of the V-2 rocket were located much further east along the Baltic coast at Peenemünde at that time in any case. Without further details, plus more information from the ground sites that apparently tracked or sighed the object, this particular case remains an enigma.

Durrant also provided information relating to an incident that occurred on 12th February 1944 at the *Heeresversuchsstelle Kummersdorf* ("Kummersdorf Army Testing Centre"), near Luckenwalde, 40km south of Berlin. According to the author, the launch of an experimental rocket, presumably a V-2, was planned for that day. The Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels, was also apparently present for the event, along with *SS-Obergruppenführer* Hans Kammler and several other senior officers. As usual, the launch was filmed. According to Durrant, the following unfolded:

"After development and printing of the film, demonstration and criticism screening in front of the authorities. Shock: a spherical body, which no one had seen on the ground, rises at the same time as the rocket and accompanies it while turning around it. It was believed to be a new type of enemy machine and information was requested."

As far as I am aware, Kummersdorf was not used for rocket research once engine testing moved to Peenemünde in the summer of 1940,

and if the location was actually the latter, no test launch was carried out on that particular day. Durrant did not provide any hint of his source for this information, and therefore I have been unable to verify any of his details.[756]

Details of an alleged encounter in 1944 were found among UFO files belonging to the FBI. These were obtained by John Greenewald, Jr. of The Black Vault fame, a repository for millions of pages of official documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). On 7th November 1957, the Special Agent in Charge at the FBI's Detroit Office sent a message to the Director of the FBI, entitled *"Re: Detroit Teletype to Bureau, 11/7/57"*, captioned *"Unidentified Flying Objects; IS-X."* The names are of course redacted, but it is worth repeating the entire message trail here in full:

"Interview of [redacted], aka. [redacted] reported in Blank Memo, five copies of which are enclosed herewith for the Bureau, was conducted by SA [redacted]. No indication of irrational or otherwise abnormal behavior by [redacted] was observed during the interview. [Redacted] advised that his communication was directed to Mr. Robert Cutler rather than to President EISENHOWER after seeing Mr. Cutler's picture and identification with the President's Office in a local paper. [Redacted] resides with his wife, nee [redacted] married in 1952 at Detroit, and four small children, in a single residence in an old Polish neighborhood at [redacted], Detroit. No previous record located in Detroit offices identifiable with [redacted] or his wife. On 11/7/57, [redacted] advised IC [redacted] that records of the [redacted], reflect only [redacted] inquiries concerning [redacted] during 6/56 and 3/57 and 6/57, which confirm his local address and employment."[757]

The unidentified witness had sent a note to Cutler, which read as follows:

“I might have information about the rocket in Texas. I heard about it on the Polish Radio Program. I would like to know to whom I could speak to.”[758]

This provoked an immediate response. J. Patrick Coyne from the Executive Office of the President, National Security Council, sent a memo to the Assistant Director of the FBI on 5th November 1957, requesting that the Bureau send someone to interview the witness. The transcript of this interview, titled *“Unidentified Flying Objects”*, was forwarded by the Detroit Office to Hoover.

“In response to a letter directed by him to Mr. Robert Cutler, Special Assistant to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, reflecting that he ‘might have some information about the rocket in Texas,’ [redacted], Detroit, was interviewed November 7, 1957, and furnished the following information:
Born February 19, 1926, in the State of Warsaw, Poland, [redacted] was brought from Poland as a Prisoner of War to Gut Alt Golssen, approximately 30 miles east of Berlin, Germany, in May 1942, where he remained until a few weeks after the end of World War II. He spent the following years at Displaced Persons Camps at Rork, Strasbourg, Offenburg, Milheim and Freiburg, Germany. He attended a radio technician school at Freiburg and for about a year was employed in a textile mill at Laurachbaden, Germany. He arrived in the United States at New York, May 2, 1951, via the ‘S.S. General Stewart’, as a Displaced Person, destined to the Reverend [redacted], Hamtramck, Michigan; his alien registration number – [redacted].

Since May 1951, he has been employed at the Gobel Brewery, Detroit.

News report of mysterious vehicle in Texas causing engines to stall prompted him to communicate with the United States Government concerning a similar phenomenon observed by him in 1944 in the area of Gut Alt Golssen.

According to [redacted], during 1944, month not recorded, while en route to work in a field a short distance north of Gut Alt Golssen, their tractor engine stalled on a road through a swamp area. No machinery or other vehicle was then visible although a noise was heard described as a high-pitched whine similar to that produced by a large electric generator.

An 'SS' guard appeared and talked briefly with the German driver of the tractor, who waited five to ten minutes, after which the noise stopped, and the tractor engine was started normally. Approximately 3 minutes later in the same swamp area, but away from the road where the work crew was cutting 'hay', he surreptitiously, because of the German in charge of the crew and 'SS' guards in the otherwise deserted area, observed a circular enclosure approximately 100 to 150 yards in diameter protected from viewers by a tarpaulin type wall approximately 50 feet high, from which a vehicle was observed to slowly rise vertically to a height sufficient to clear the wall and then to move slowly horizontally a short distance out of his view, which was obstructed by nearby trees.

This vehicle, observed from approximately 500 feet, was described as circular in shape, 75 to 100 yards in diameter, and about 14 feet high, consisting of dark gray stationary top and bottom sections, five to six feet high. The approximate three foot middle section appeared to be a rapidly moving component producing a continuous blur similar to an aeroplane propeller but extending the circumference of the vehicle so far as could be observed. The noise emanating from the vehicle was similar but of somewhat lower pitch than the noise previously heard. The engine of the tractor again stalled on this occasion and no effort was made by the German driver to start the engine until the noise stopped, after which the engine started normally.

Uninsulated metal, possibly copper, cables one and one-half inch to two inches in diameter, on and under the surface of the ground, in some places covered by water, were observed on this and previous occasions, apparently running between the enclosure and a small concrete column-type structure between the road and enclosure.

This area was not visited by [redacted] again until shortly after the end of World War II, when it was observed the cables had been removed and the previous locations of the concrete were covered by water. [Redacted] stated he has not been in communication since 1945 with any of the work crew of 16 or 18 men, consisting of Russian, French and Polish POWs, who had discussed this incident among themselves many times. However, of these, [redacted] was able to recall by name only [redacted], no address known, described as then about 50 years of age and presumed by [redacted] to have returned to Poland after 1945."[759]

The reference to Texas, where a mysterious aerial vehicle was causing car engines to stall, related to multiple sightings of an egg-shaped object around Levelland on the night of 2nd/3rd November 1957. The town's fire chief and sheriff were among the witnesses. Dr. James E. McDonald, who was referred to earlier in this book in relation to the RAF No.9 Sqdn April 1945 case, investigated the cases and disputed the official explanation of ball lightning.[760]

J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, took this information seriously and forwarded the information received from his Detroit Office to several agencies, including the Office of Security at the Department of State, the Deputy Director (Plans) of the CIA, the Chief of Security Division at the Army's Intelligence Department, the Director of Naval Intelligence and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI).

It is not known if any investigation were carried out by these agencies but in the height of the Cold War, this information would probably have raised alarm bells since reports of possible advanced technology that could conceivably have ended up in Russian hands were usually followed up. Although no details of subsequent action is known, elements of the witness's story certainly ring true. Numerous Poles were forced to work on German farms during WW2 as most able-bodied men under 60 were serving in the armed forces, in Nazi party organisations or would shortly be called up for service in the *Volkssturm* (a civilian militia equivalent to the British "Home Guard").

His presence on one near Berlin in 1944 was not unusual. Gut Alt Golssen – a village more commonly known as Altgolssen, is actually 30 miles south of the capital and not east as per the FBI report. A swampy area does indeed lie about a kilometre or so north of Altgolssen, on the other side of the Berlin-Dresden railway line. Whilst I cannot find any evidence of a "circular enclosure" in this immediate area, the *Luftwaffe* certainly did operate from a facility about five kilometres away to the east. This was a small airfield known as Briesen-Brand, which had been built between 1938 and 1939 as a training station.[761] No front-line aircraft were based there, and the site consisted of a one-kilometre long grass runway across a large circular cleared area surrounded by forest. It would not have been beyond the bounds of possibility for a secret German aircraft project to have used the Briesen-Brand site in 1944, as it could have been hidden away from prying eyes, although the Polish witness's description of the flying machine does not match any known project. However, its revolving middle section is reminiscent of a case from July 1943 in Poland that we will look at in Chapter 9. The airfield was expanded by the Soviets after the war for use by Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 *Fagot* and Ilyushin Il-28 *Beagle* bombers. More modern MiG-23 and MiG-27 *Floggers* were operated from there from the 1980s until the 16th Air Army returned to Russia in 1992.[762]

Georg von Zirk was a *Luftwaffe* navigator who flew in Heinkel He 111 bombers on the Eastern Front during WW2. Although he had forgotten the exact date and location of his "Foo Fighter" sighting, he provided details of a 1944 encounter on the central sector of the front-line during an interview held long after the war:

"We were en route to a target, I don't remember which any more. As always, I was lying in the front section of the cockpit, navigating. Suddenly, a flying object overtook us from behind. It was on the same course as us. It passed about 200 metres underneath, at the speed of a cannon shell. In the dark, I could only see a large ball of fire, moving horizontally. It was out of sight in about five seconds. We were flying at an altitude of about 3000 metres [9,842 feet]."[763]

The Russians operated thousands of *Katyusha* launchers (the nickname for their rocket artillery) but these simple projectiles did not reach very high altitudes. It is therefore not clear what von Zirk saw, and the former navigator did not elaborate on this incident afterwards.

In *Le Livre noir des soucoupes volante*, Durrant provided an account of a *Luftwaffe* encounter which allegedly occurred at the "Rechlin-Roggenthin Test Centre" on 29th September 1944. At 1045 hours that morning, an unnamed pilot was test-flying a new Me 262 jet fighter. According to the author, *"his attention was attracted by two luminescent dots to the right."* As he approached, the pilot saw that the dots were part of a cylindrical body, estimated at over 100 metres long. Several portholes were noted on the sides of the object and several "vertical rods", possibly antennae of some description, were also observed. The cylinder had no wings, but the pilot stated it was flying at an excess of 2000 km/h. At one point before the object flew off into the distance, the test pilot managed to get within 500 metres of the device and later drew a sketch of what he had seen. [764]

Unfortunately, once again the French author provided no further details about where his report had been obtained from. The *Erprobungsstelle* at Rechlin did have a satellite airfield at the village of Roggentin, located a couple of miles to the east of its main site, and testing of Me 262 jets would have been carried out there during September 1944 even though it was effectively only a large grass field without any hard-surfaced runways. However, four days before the alleged sighting, the USAAF had mounted a daylight raid on both Rechlin and Roggentin, severely damaging both sites to the point where much of the testing work shifted to the *Erprobungsstelle* satellite airfield at Larz, a few miles south of the main site. Whilst this does not rule out the possibility of aircraft operating from Roggentin on the day in question, it is something to bear in mind when weighing up the validity of the report. However, there is one further point worth considering. The anonymous *Luftwaffe* pilot's description of seeing a long cylindrical body with portholes closely resembles the mysterious

object witnessed by Sgt. Cockcroft's bomber crew sixteen months beforehand. Without further details such as the test pilot's name or where Durrant obtained his story from, it remains an interesting tale, one which may or may not be true.

At first glance, Henry Durrant's book *Le Livre noir des soucoupes volantes* was a veritable goldmine of *Luftwaffe* sightings. However, they lacked substance in terms of verifiable information, and the next case will take us down a very deep rabbit-hole:

"Twice again, the Messerschmitt 163, that is to say Komet rocket planes undergoing tests, succeeded in filming these enormous flying cigars up close. Georg Kamper, director of Operation Uranus, gathered the documentation for Sonderbureau 13 consisting of reports, photographs, and films; he studied the problem on record and was considering publishing his findings. But the journalists who were able to contact him did not know more and, for a long time, we have not talked about Kamper."[765]

Durrant had not given any hint of his sources for this information, but it was certainly intriguing to say the least. *Operation Uranus? Sonderbureau 13?* Had the Germans established an investigation into the strange objects being seen by pilots and other aircrew, and if so, why was it not better known in the field of Ufology? The author included the following tantalising snippet of information:

"Indeed: in 1944, disturbing reports by leading war pilots were received in huge numbers by members of the senior staff of the German Air Force in Berlin. So much so that the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe was compelled to create the 'Sonder Buro Nr 13' whose activity received the code name 'Operation Uranus'. The Special Office 13 was composed of aviator officers, engineers, aeronautics, scientific advisers. This first official body begins by gathering the observation reports that have already reached the General Staff in order to study them."[766]

Nine years later, details of these hitherto unknown organisations were also provided by the Italian author Marcello Coppetti in his book *Arma Segrata.* He appeared quite knowledgeable and offered the following information, although looking closely, it seems that he had simply recycled the details in Durrant's book:

"For the first time in the world, a government created an official body responsible for solving the problem of mysterious celestial objects. Indeed, in 1944, disturbing reports emanating from pilots, began - by their accumulation - to be received by the members of the General Staff of the German Air Force in Berlin. So much so that the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe was led to create the Sonder Buro No.13 whose activity received the code name "Operation Uranus". The Special Office 13 was made up of air force officers, aeronautical engineers, and scientific advisers. This first official body began by gathering the observation reports already received by the General Staff, in order to study them."[767]

If this information was true, then in WW2 the Germans had clearly established the first official organisation to investigate UFO sightings, and long before the Americans. The question was, where did Durrant obtain his details from, and were they legitimate? Former high-ranking *Luftwaffe* officers were asked about *Sonder Büro 13* in the 1970s, but they did not have any knowledge of such a project.[768] However, "Georg Kamper" was obviously a name that could be checked. He clearly had influence in the Nazi hierarchy or relevant experience to be placed in charge of a secret investigative body. Despite a thorough search, I could not find a Nazi party official, officer, engineer, or scientist bearing Kamper's name. In fact, a search for anyone connected with *Sonder Büro 13* or *Operation Uranus* will not reward the researcher with any results beyond the books above, and there is a very good reason for this. Durrant simply made it all up.

Henry Durrant, whose real name was Didier Serres, died some years ago. Before anyone suggests that I am impugning the

reputation of a dead man, the controversy regarding false items in his 1970 book *Le Livre noir des soucoupes volantes* has already been well documented and set out in full in Ufology newsletters dating back to the early 1980s. Given that these were French-language publications which did not receive much, if any, exposure outside the country, it was likely few would realise that *Sonder Büro 13* was in fact a hoax, intended to expose authors Durrant suspected of plagiarising his works without crediting or verifying his research. Indeed, numerous publications have listed details of *Sonder Büro 13* as gospel, and if one looks on the Internet they will find plenty of websites that include it as part of the "Foo Fighter" story. Few if any of these authors or webpage creators bothered to check whether the information they are including is correct, nor do they often give the original source.

What follows are excerpts from an article in a *GEPO Informations* newsletter regarding the whole affair. It followed on from an interview in the same edition that Thierry Rocher had conducted with Durrant about Ufology and his views on various topics. Entitled "*Sonder Buro – It was too big!*", Rocher provided an account of his investigation into suggestions that the author had indeed fabricated the reference to the German wartime research organisation in his 1970 book, based on recent items in other French-language bulletins. In a reply to an open letter from a "Mr Brauwez", Thierry Pinvidic had received information directly from Durrant and this was published in *Ufologie Contact*, newsletter of the SPEPSE:

"On the other hand, Durrant put it in writing for me: the Luftwaffe Sonder Buro 13, code "Uranus", he invented it. To make a devilishly conclusive experiment: here's how many authors would take it at face value. It works."[769]

This flew in the face of a second article on the subject of *Sonder Büro 13*, published in *UFO-Informations*, the bulletin of the Association des Amis de Marc Thirouin (AAMT), Thirouin being a pioneering French ufologist. Titled *"When astronomers see UFOs"*

and written by Phillippe Schneyder, president of ENROVNI-France, the article included several references to the alleged German organisation:

"Here are, nonetheless, books to the ufologist reader or not, the few notary facts that we have verified (...). As for the Germans, indeed they had an identical role of screening precisely against secret weapons, a military body called Sonder Büro 13 which investigated all the civilian or military observations."[770]

Clearly both statements could not both be true. Thierry Rocher decided to investigate the story further in search of the truth:

“During our meetings in July, August and September, Thierry Pinvidic told me the following points several times: Henry Durrant had written to him when he read his book ‘The Gordian Knot’ [which apparently repeated the false story]. It was after Thierry Pinvidic had telephoned him (or vice versa, TP does not remember any more) and that he had learned that the information on the "Sonder Buro" was a false creation and that in addition, it was not the only one in H. Durrant's book.”[771]

Rocher then wrote to Durrant direct and received the following reply on 18th September 1982:

"The information concerning the Sonder Buro 13 appeared in 1970 in ‘Le Livre Noir des Soucoupes Volantes’, p.81. There is in this book, two pieces of information without any reference: it is my experience as an old journalist that urged me to expose "copycats". Have already done so, to my knowledge and since you want to know the names…” [he listed five French UFO authors who had included the case as their own, saying that the list was not exhaustive.] “None of the authors listed had quoted Mr Durrant, and no-one had contacted him to verify the source of the ‘information’”.[772]

In a further letter dated 8th December 1982, Durrant was much more explicit about what he had done:

"Sonder Buro Nr 13 came straight out of my imagination. (…). Obviously, I did not do any research about this Büro, since I saw that it had come out of my imagination, which made the normal consequence, brought logically, which still confuses the reader now. Yet Hermann Goering's reflection should at least have raised suspicion."[773]

Despite Durrant's confession, either word had not reached certain quarters in French Ufology, or they refused to believe it. Rocher attended a conference in late 1982 where the author Jean Sider was present, together with the president of ENROVNI-France, Philippe Schneyder, who as mentioned above seemed to be convinced that *Sonder Büro 13* existed. Rocher confronted him with questions about the organisation and printed his replies in the same GEPO newsletter:

"The Sonder Buro was only a camouflaged organism (but very real) which had already on Hitler's orders as instructions to follow this kind of problem. The Nazis were very intricate, Goebbels himself knew it per the 'foo fighters'."

Jean Sider then asked him: *"Because it is really an organization which exists?"*, to which Schneyder answered: *"Ah, yes! Absolutely! I am convinced of it! It was even much more than one thinks!"*[774]
I have included the in-depth machinations of the *Sonder Büro 13* debacle as a somewhat salutary tale when it comes to believing everything one hears about wartime UFOs and the Nazi flying disc programme. Even confronted with a *mea culpa* from the culprit themselves, some seem incapable of realising that what they believe is wrong. Whilst I understand Durrant's motives in doing this, fact and fiction are often interchangeable in the world of Ufology, more so now that falsehoods take on a life of their own via the Internet and

become established facts. Once they achieve this status, they are incredibly difficult to disprove or remove from circulation.[775] Whilst I have concentrated on the *Sonder Büro 13* story, the French author also stated that a second case in his 1970 book was not true either, although the GEPO report does not indicate which one it was. Whilst I initially believed that it may have been the 1942 Banak case, which I firmly believe is a hoax, it would appear from *Le Livre noir des soucoupes volantes* that the reference to the test pilots of two Me 163 *Komet* rocket-propelled interceptors managing to film "flying cigars" was another trap for Durrant's "copycats".[776] However, according to the UFO-DB database, the case involving the Fw 190 fighters in December 1943 was reported to the "special office N13", which sounds suspiciously like *Sonder Büro Nr. 13.*[777]
I have therefore come to the conclusion that each of the German cases in Durrant's book may well be suspect. They suffer from a lack of references, dates, times, witness names and other details which can be independently verified, so cannot be accepted as entirely true.

Whilst not directly connected with the *Luftwaffe*, I have included the next case here as the witness believed the object that was observed must have been seen by locally-based (and therefore German) pilots. The following account appeared in a 1958 issue of the German UFO magazine *Weltraumbote* ("Space Messenger") and occurred in Dresden in 1945:

"It happened here, in March or early April 1945. I had a clear view of the sky from my position. My first thought was that it was an airplane, but I could plainly see that it was round, and had neither propeller nor wings. Also, it was hovering noiselessly in the air. Then it suddenly disappeared, like a broken soap bubble. I also recall that the unfamiliar object was silvery-coloured and flat, not round like a balloon. I especially remember the sudden disappearance, like something that wanted to avoid my gaze…. The war was still going on at the time, and that evening I spoke to a friend. 'Oh, did you see

it too?', he asked. Air observation posts probably also saw it, but not a single word was uttered about UFOs or flying saucers."[778]

The terms "UFO" and "flying saucer" would come along much later, and suggest a post-war re-imagining of the story, but it is intriguing, nonetheless, as accounts from the German side of the front lines are few and far between. It is also dated long before Durrant's book emerged, so cannot be tarnished with the same brush.

A final case regarding *Luftwaffe* sightings was discovered buried deep in a German newsletter from 1976. Although the report was second-hand, being part of someone else's letter written in January 1960, it involved a *Luftwaffe* pilot called Schwab. In May 1944, he was based in Denmark when his *Staffel* received several new long-range aircraft. His unit received orders to test the new machines by carrying out a long-distance flight from Norway to Munich. Arriving over the city, which was covered in thick cloud, Schwab's unit received a warning about an impending air raid from personnel based at Munich airfield. Enemy bombers were approaching from the south, and his unit was asked to land immediately. Instead of following this instruction, Schwab and a few of his colleagues elected to head over the Austrian Alps instead, presumably searching for a safer place to land near Innsbruck. He flew over the Grossglockner in the Tauern Alps but could not see any hint of an approaching fleet of enemy aircraft.

Suddenly, Schwab saw a "never-before-seen" flying object on a parallel course close to his bomber. It was described as heel-shaped, with the two forward sides tapering slightly inwards. A dome could also be distinguished on top of the craft. Initially shocked at seeing the strange object flying next to his aircraft, the pilot realised that it seemed to be harmless, as it showed no signs of hostile action. He could not recall how long it flew alongside his bomber. Remembering that he had a camera in the cockpit, he reached for it and took a series of photographs. As Schwab began to take these shots, the craft suddenly shot upwards. It also seemed to be emitting some type of ray, pointing downwards. He had the distinct

impression that whoever was flying the machine did not want to be photographed.[779]

As with most *Luftwaffe* reports, the details are somewhat sketchy and hard to corroborate. The unit's name is not mentioned, nor is the type of aircraft, although it is likely to have been a Junkers Ju 188, a development of the successful Ju 88 twin-engined bomber. When originally published, it was suggested that the mysterious craft was merely a reflection from his cockpit, or possibly a piece from another aircraft in his formation that had somehow become detached and flew past his own machine. As the pilot reported that the object was flying a parallel course to his for some time, it is unlikely that this craft was simply a section of a fellow airman's aircraft. The photographs have not turned up although the CENAP report included a series of drawings which depicted what was apparently on them. I have not been able to confirm any further details about Schwab or the case in question, although this was in keeping with the other sightings that appear in this chapter.

Another sighting was alleged to have occurred above a POW camp at Heydebreck, Silesia on 22nd January 1945. At 3pm that afternoon, a group of British prisoners, together with others from different countries, were at roll call in the central square. Conscious of the Soviets getting ever closer, the Germans had decided to move the POWs westwards, and they soon embarked on a four-month long trek (the "Long March") across the rapidly-diminishing *Reich*. Not everyone would survive the experience. Above the camp, at around 3pm, a four-engined bomber was spotted flying overhead at around 18,000 feet. At first glance, it appeared to be on fire, with flames coming out of its tail section. Others wondered whether a parachute flare had discharged. As they looked closer, the witnesses in the camp saw a brilliant glowing sphere of white light, one which was closely following the bomber no matter which course it followed. Both the aircraft and the light were observed for several minutes as they flew overhead.[780]

It is unclear what the original source of this story was, but POW camps were certainly located at Heydebreck in WW2.

Arbeitskommando E711A and *Bau und Arbeits Nr.20* had been established there. A number of British prisoners were housed in the latter and forced to work in the local chemical producing facilities.

One of the last sightings in Germany during the war occurred in March 1945 and involved a civilian, known as Gisela B. She was a nurse, serving in a medical unit somewhere in the part of north-eastern Germany still under the *Reich's* control, probably in Pomerania. At around 1900 hours one evening that month, she was walking with a wounded Latvian soldier. They witnessed a strange object, something described as being shaped like a Zeppelin that was flying westwards in the direction of Mecklenburg and Hamburg. It was slim, with what looked like a smooth outer "skin" but had no gondolas or engine installations fitted to the hull. The device flew low and relatively slow, making no sound at all. Although no actual means of propulsion could be determined by the witnesses, "the emergence of an engine flame" was just visible at the rear of the craft. In addition, there were what looked like exhaust plumes emanating from points along its sides. A series of what looked like windows ran along the visible side of the craft, all of which were illuminated. However, if these were indeed windows, the interior could not be made out. There were no other lights on the object. As far as the two witnesses could ascertain, the device was under some form of control as it proceeded along a straight, unwavering course. No exact size was quoted but it was believed to be a large craft.[781]

German officers based at the nearby hospital dismissed the idea that it was a *Sperrballon* (barrage balloon) or a Zeppelin. Since no explanation could be found, everyone believed it was a secret weapon, and the matter was dropped. When the sighting was mentioned forty-eight years later, an attempt was made to find the Latvian witness, but this was unsuccessful. The Germans used volunteers from all three of the Baltic States in security battalions on anti-partisan duties, and there were two Lativan SS units, 15. *Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS* and 19. *Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS*, which made up the Latvian Legion. The latter was trapped in the Courland Pocket, cut off since July 1944, whilst the

15th retreated along the Baltic coast towards northern Germany and was virtually annihilated in battles with the Russians during the spring of 1945. No more details about the nurse or the sighting have emerged since it was reported in 1994.

Although Vienna had already fallen to the Russians on 13th April 1945, the following report is included as it demonstrates that sightings of mystery objects occurred after German troops had retreated from the capital. A letter from a witness, the painter and architect Karl Engel, was published in *MUFON CES Bericht*. Over the course of several days before the Russians finally took Vienna, he watched the battles unfurl over the front lines 20km away. Engel knew how quickly Russian and German artillery rockets travelled once they were fired, but he also saw something else entirely:

"From a height of about 60 degrees, points of light were shooting across the horizon like lightning, at least ten times faster than the rockets. At that time no man-made aircraft had ever reached this speed. Objects looking as though they were dots flying across the front lines suddenly halted, then flew horizontally across the front at the same speed, stopped again and then finally disappeared. The same spectacle was repeated over the next few nights until the Russians eventually moved into Vienna. These weren't light effects but steered objects."[782]

It is not clear what Engel was actually witnessing here. Fast moving craft capable of changing direction without slowing down or stopping have been reported in recent years. However, the objects seen near Vienna in April 1945 did apparently come to rest in mid-air before zooming off in different directions. I have not come across any reports of strange aerial devices in the histories of the defence of Vienna towards the end of the war.

Despite many commentators suggesting that *Luftwaffe* pilots saw "Foo Fighters" too, these claims are not really borne out by the amount of actual testimony that is available, and no verifiable sources of information exist.

The various air forces engaged in the conflict were not the only sources of case reports during WW2. We shall now turn our attention to sightings in Occupied Europe, reported by civilians after the war. At the time, telling the German authorities about an encounter with a strange flying object was definitely not recommended, as the occupiers did not look kindly upon local people taking a close interest in military activities and would have reacted accordingly. It was far better to stay silent for the good of one's health.

Chapter 8:
Occupied France and Belgium

The planes continued to whirl around the vertical 'cloud' in the form of a stove pipe…

> - Witness account of *Luftwaffe* aircraft flying around a strange object which resembled a grey-aluminium coloured "cloud", 1941.

Reports of strange flying objects over Occupied Europe during WW2 are scarce, especially those that were spotted over France and Belgium, although this is not really surprising. Civilians who took an unhealthy interest in anything flying over their country may well have been regarded by the German security apparatus as either being Allied spies or *la Résistance*, something which would have earned them a trip to prison or worse, summary execution. It was therefore better to ignore what was going on above their heads, even if it looked out of place. However, this did not stop people actually seeing objects that either frightened them or that they could not understand, and the information was mentally filed away, only to be reported much later, mostly from the 1950s onwards when the first French and Belgian UFO researchers started publishing books on the subject and appealed for further witnesses to come forward. It appears that the first report of a strange flying vehicle occurred whilst the German invasion of Belgium was underway in May 1940.

La Chronique des OVNI, by Michel Bougard and published in 1977, includes as its first wartime case the story of an ambulance crew in Liege on the night of 16th May 1940, only a matter of days after Belgian troops had retreated from the city in the face of the German advance. The primary witness had come forward in 1975 with her account of the incident. Monsieur and Madame Delsa, both of whom were ambulance drivers, had received a call about midnight on the 16th, asking them to head quickly to Herstal, a couple of

kilometres north-east of Liege along the River Meuse, where a young woman was just about to give birth. The outward journey took place without any problem, apart from the couple being stopped briefly by a patrol of German soldiers, who insisted on escorting them through the centre of Liege. Around two o'clock in the morning, after the ambulance had left the Lycee de Waha in Liege, which had been transformed into a maternity hospital, the Delsas were heading along the Quai Saint Leonard, running along the north bank of the river. Mme. Delsa gave the following account of her sighting:

"The night was dark, with the blackout being in force. It was then that I saw in the sky a luminous form like two upturned plates, very large and followed by a long tail of fire. The object must have been about 300 meters above the ground and its equivalent diameter was twice that of the full moon. Seeing this thing rushing right at us, I screamed in fear and asked my husband to speed up."

As he did so, the object changed course, the long trail of fire disappearing as it came to a halt in mid-air. Mme. Delsa was by now shaking and clearly terrified:

"The phenomenon soon recovered its movement, resuming its initial trajectory and again letting this luminous trail appear. It disappeared to the south, towards the center of Liege. By this stage, my husband had stopped the ambulance to try to calm me because of fright, and I had started to cry."

This sighting deeply affected the witness, who remembered, some thirty-five years after the events in Liege, details of the UFO encounter which had only lasted for less than a minute. Her description of "two upturned plates" also matched those which would be reported by others around the world from the late 1940s onwards. [783]

Bougard also featured another 1940 case in *La Chronique des OVNI*, although the exact date of the event is unknown. The witness's name was withheld due to wishing anonymity, although he

is referred to by his initials, “M. B.”. He lived in Toulx-Sainte-Croix, some 80 km north-east of Limoges. One evening, he was suddenly awakened by an intense light that illuminated his bedroom. Looking out of the window, he saw a luminous globe moving slowly and silently north of the village. About the size of a full moon, the object was moving in various directions and stopping from time to time. According to M. B., *"the interior of the globe was dotted with multi-coloured luminous points"*, and it remained visible for about half an hour before disappearing.[784]

The following story does not centre on France itself, but involved Vichy troops stationed in Algeria, part of Marshal Phillipe Pétain’s independent French state which was allied to the Germans. On 4th April 1942, a small group of *Armée de l’Armistice* (Vichy armed forces) troops led by *Capitaine* Louis de Prieur, stopped to rest up for a few days at an isolated fort located at Ouallene, in south-western Algeria, around 150km from the border with what was French Sudan (now Mali). The officer was in charge of around 25 soldiers, and the fort had a permanent garrison of thirteen men, including two radio operators and a meteorologist who ran the weather station there. All were witness to a strange object that appeared overhead one morning. Le Prieur himself recounted the event in December 1953:

“We had been there for a few days when, one morning, the meteorological officier marinier [“petty officer”] introduced himself and drew my attention to the presence of a ‘planet’ that had appeared in a cloudless sky directly above the fort. The object could be seen with the naked eye as a small white-aluminium dot and there were forty witnesses who could observe it without difficulty, as the atmosphere was perfectly clear.

When we examined it more closely with the help of our field glasses and the theodolite’s scope, the ‘planet’ resembled a small moon or five-franc piece. It had a pale metallic glint and seemed to be suspended at an altitude of 5000 to 6000 metres. Apparently, it seemed to be stationary, but prolonged observation with the

theodolite showed that it was moving, spinning slowly. We counted three revolutions in eight hours.

The next morning, it was still there, still directly above us, and we started to get used to it, thinking it was a stray star or a new moon captured by the Earth's gravity, because no-one imagined back then that there could be flying saucers. By the dawn of the third day, it was gone. The observatory in Algiers was consulted, and it told us, sometime later, that the object was nothing more than the star Vega.

This explanation seemed implausible to us, because a star does not remain in a position vertically above one location over two consecutive days and close enough to observe its movements with a simple scope!"[785]

The Algiers Observatory's explanation certainly appeared odd. The witness stated that the strange object had disappeared when they looked on what would have been the third morning of sightings.

Other civilians witnessed events that they committed to memory, something that the Germans could prevent nor control. In 1989, a wartime witness had contacted French ufologist and author Jean Sider, stating that he had been interested in UFOs since an encounter in 1943. He had also seen something very strange two years earlier. The man wished to remain completely anonymous, as he had seen the treatment other witnesses had received after speaking out and did not wish to share the same fate. Indeed, according to Sider, he had contacted another ufologist beforehand only to have his testimony overlooked because it was considered to be too "Adamski-like", that is to say, too sensational. Despite the cases allegedly occurring forty-five years earlier, Jean Sider spoke to him at length, and after throwing in a few trick questions that did not flag up any irregularities in the man's story, believed his account to be true. Therefore, in Sider's book *Ultra Top Secret: ces OVNIs qui font peur* ("Ultra Top Secret: these scary UFOs"), published in 1990, the author used the pseudonym "S. Théau". However, the witness died in 1993 or 1994 and was subsequently revealed to be Daniel Léger. The following account appears in both *Ultra Top Secret* and

Timothy Good's 1998 book *Alien Base*, the latter including Léger's real name for the first time.

Daniel Léger was born in 1922 and during the German occupation of France, lived in a small village around fifteen kilometres south of Le Mans, where he worked in a butcher's shop. According to the account he gave Sider, it was one afternoon in the summer of 1941 (he could not recall the exact date) when he was standing in a street in his village. He suddenly saw *"some sort of 'carousel' in the sky, between 6000 and 8000 meters."* This seems exaggerated, as 8km is around five miles up and details would have been hard to make out at that altitude without binoculars. It may be that the witness over-estimated the height that the following took place. Sider then went onto describe how Léger watched something decidedly odd unfold:

"This show was located under the cirrus clouds above the Raineries airfield, occupied by the German air force. There were about a dozen German planes (Heinkel and Stukas), which circled in all directions around a kind of large grey-aluminium 'cloud' in the shape of a stove pipe, surrounded by cloudy flakes and evolving slowly in an inclined position. Above this set, another larger luminous 'cloud' hovered, moving at the same slow pace."

Clearly intrigued, the 19-year old decided to try and get closer to this aerial ballet, in order to obtain a better view. He grabbed his bicycle and quickly pedalled along the road towards the *Luftwaffe* airfield at Raineries. Around two kilometres short of the camp, he was stopped by a group of German soldiers who were preventing civilians from going any further. However, they could not prevent the Frenchman watching what was happening:

"The planes continued to whirl around the vertical 'cloud' in the form of a stove pipe, manoeuvring as if they were attacking it, seeming to break up, sometimes falling like a dead leaf and then recovering a few seconds later, as if their engine had been shut down in flight."

The witness stayed close to the edge of the German cordon for about an hour, watching this “merry-go-round” which maintained its slow progression from west to east. Léger watched the “carousel” head off to the east and unable to follow it as its route would have taken him further away from home, rode back to his village. After the war ended, he visited the municipal library in Le Mans to see if the local newspaper had included any details of the event but found nothing. In *Ultra Top Secret*, Sider appealed for any further witnesses to come forward, but I am not aware of any taking up his offer.[786]

As an aviation enthusiast who has been interested in *Luftwaffe* aircraft for nearly fifty years, this story has intrigued me since I first read about it. I can understand why a ufologist would hesitate in believing it, although there are parts that ring true if it is compared with subsequent cases. Mysterious “clouds” are certainly part of Ufology, as is the phenomenon of automobile engines suddenly ceasing to function when a suspected “craft” is in the vicinity. Léger’s mention of the Germans using the airfield at Le Mans is certainly correct at least. In 1941, the *Luftwaffe* was operating from the airfield at Raineries, which is nowadays known as Aéroport Le Mans Arnage. JG 54, which flew Messerschmitt Bf 109E fighters, was based at Raineries that year, although only one *Gruppe* from the unit was in residence at any one time. In 1941 it was just a large grass field, hard runways not being built there until thirty years later, although this would not have precluded the use of larger aircraft such as the “Heinkels and Stukas” that Léger mentioned, as the two types were perfectly capable of operating from grass runways, even when fully loaded with fuel and bombs.

However, this is the point where I am not so sure about the Frenchman’s story. If the witness is to be believed, then several aircraft had attempted to climb up towards the cloud, only to fall “like a dead leaves” before rising up again. Rather than “Heinkels and Stukas” as per Léger’s account, this would suggest machines with a degree of manoeuvrability, such as the Bf 109E single-seat fighters that were at Raineries. If there was some sort of perceived threat to

the aerodrome, why did the *Luftwaffe* commander for the area not send up his most potent aircraft to investigate? There were no Heinkel fighters in front-line service in 1941 – there was a pre-war design, the He 112, but it was never placed into full-scale production in Germany and was not sent to France. Only twenty-five He 100 single-seat fighters were built, and they were used for propaganda purposes (as the fictitious "He 113"), only ever serving as the factory-defence unit for the Heinkel factory at Marienehe and flown by company test pilots. The only Heinkel type in France at the time would have been the slow, lumbering He 111 bomber. "Falling out of the sky like a dead leaf" sounds like the definition of a stall and spin – if a twin-engined medium bomber ended up in that situation it would have been incredibly dangerous for the crew and the pilot would have not cared to repeat the procedure. Junkers Ju 87 *Stuka* dive-bombers were present in France during the Battle of Britain, although by the end of 1940 they were being transferred to the Mediterranean front and were then active in the Balkans and Russia in 1941. It seems as though the two types of *Luftwaffe* aircraft mentioned by Léger seem to be the least likely to have been on the scene at Raineries, let alone those sent to investigate such a strange "carousel". Whilst this is not proof that the Frenchman made up his tale, it does introduce an element of doubt. However, the witness may have been simply confused about the types of aircraft he was watching, or just using "Heinkels and Stukas" as generic terms for German wartime aircraft.

As no other witnesses have ever come forward to corroborate or challenge the Frenchman's statements, then it remains a story, but an intriguing one at that. Given the haste with which the Germans evacuated France after the Allied invasion in June 1944, it is extremely unlikely that any official *Luftwaffe* records relating to the alleged incident survived, if indeed it actually took place. This is not the last time that Daniel Léger will feature in this book, and the subsequent encounter that he claimed he witnessed was even stranger still.

Another case featured in Bougard's *La Chronique des OVNI* dated back to June or early July 1942 and involved a husband and

wife living in the small village of Cussey-sur-l'Ognon, on the border of the Doubs and Haute-Saône departments, about 8 km north of Besançon in eastern France. One of the two witnesses came forward thirty years after the event to give his story. Unlike the earlier reports from France and Belgium, this actually featured a strange-looking craft which had reportedly left evidence of a landing. It was a hot day, and M. and Mme. Bonardi took advantage of the afternoon to rest in a wheat field, not far from where farm workers were busy toiling. At around four o'clock, the witnesses were suddenly distracted by a bright light and a sensation of increasing heat.

An oval-shaped object, midnight-blue in colour and with a silver-grey, aluminium dome on top, was suddenly spotted. On its dome, two vertical tubes could be seen, with a thin tapering antennae located between them. Located at points along the side of the object were a series of portholes, and three legs protruded from its lower surfaces, which were taken to be landing gear. The farm workers had by this stage noticed the oval-shaped object too and stopped working in order to watch what it was doing. It was about fifty metres from the Bonardis, hovering less than a metre off the ground. The object was spinning around and emanating a sound like a noisy fan. Lights appeared in the portholes, flashing on and off at a regular rate, as if communicating in Morse code. The witnesses drew closer, and Mme. Bonardi began to hear what she described as "muffled noise, like murmurs of conversation." The farm workers were visibly frightened by this stage, and they all watched as the object continued its slow course over the field before suddenly rising vertically and disappearing. It was believed that the strange object had either landed or almost landed at one point, so M. and Mme. Bonardi checked the location where they thought this had occurred. At the site of the alleged landing, they found a circle-shaped area of one-and-a-half metres in diameter, where the grass was totally flattened. The duration of the couple's observation was some six to ten minutes.[787]

A further sighting occurred at Herseaux, just over the border in Belgium, about ten kilometres north-east of Lille. During the summer

of 1943, M. Delmeire, who was forty-one at the time, gave an account of his sighting after the war:

"I was returning from work which ended at 1900 hours, and I remember it was still light. For over a minute I then saw a very shiny, red, round object with the shape of a beer barrel. It had a diameter of one metre, and passed about 1 km from me, at an altitude of about twenty meters. At first I thought it was an aeroplane, but it made no noise. Passing near the rooftops, it lit them up in an intense light, before departing in the direction of Kortrijk, near Welvegem."[788]

In August 1943, another witness, M. Germain, saw what he described as *"an enormous disc, shining like the sun"*, quickly traversing the skies over Hérault, near Montpellier.[789]

The following case dates from November 1943 and was reported by a 17-year old, M. Valéo, who was riding on his bicycle along Route National 165 between La Trinité-Surzur to Muzillac, south-east of Vannes, at around 2030 hours. He had just rode over the Draillic River bridge and was on the point of passing the chapel of Saint Judith on his left when he noticed a "luminous ball", pale yellow in colour and slightly fuzzy in outline. It seemed to have just lifted off from the rough pasture beyond the chapel (which are now cultivated fields). Although somewhat fuzzy in outline, the "ball" had a diameter of around 4 or 5 metres, and rose slowly into the air, following a helical path as it did so. Valéo watched the object climb slowly and silently for nearly ten minutes, observing that it soon curved away to the south and was finally lost to sight in the direction of Billiers. No farm buildings or other dwellings were located nearby, and the nearest German units were based at Vannes, Damgan and Questembert, the nearest being around 6 or 7km away. Once he reached home, none of his family believed him when he mentioned what he had witnessed. Valéo remembers not being able to sleep at all that night, as the earlier events kept playing out in his mind.[790] Of course, he was unable to ask the German military authorities

what the strange object had been, in case he was accused of spying or being part of *la Résistance.*

On an unspecified date in September 1944, German infantryman Erich Immel was manning some field fortifications with five other soldiers from his unit near Epinal, in the Vosges Mountains. They were awaiting the arrival of Allied troops when they saw a silvery-white object, *"like aluminium"*, hovering above a line of railway wagons. Immel estimated it to be around two metres wide. The device started to approach the six German soldiers, assuming a more oval shape as it did so. Feeling threatened by the object, the soldiers opened fire, causing it to become *"luminous like the sun"* before disappearing.[791] I have not been able to confirm exactly which unit Immel belonged to, but the *16. Volksgrenadier-Division* was certainly defending the Epinal area at that time.

The last report during the war related to mid-October 1944 and featured in *Doubt*, the Fortean Society Journal:

“A M. Nordstern of Mittainvillier, Eure-et-Loire, saw an enormous object shaped like a shell flying at an altitude of 35,000 to 45,000 feet. Sen through glasses, it showed a marked scintillation rather like that of a mirror reflecting the rays of the sun. It was rapidly revolving horizontally. The object moved in an upright position with the point directed downwards. The diameter of its upper part was from 100 to 200 feet and its height at least 350 feet.”

Estimating sizes and heights of objects when one has no idea what they are is a constant source of frustration when it comes to trying to analyse reports of this type. At least the report was very thorough when it came to describing the movements of the mystery flying machine, although it is also hard to explain how the speed of the object was calculated:

“When it first appeared, it was moving at the rate of 125 miles per hour. M. Nordstern could now discern a slight oscillation which was

frequently repeated. The upper cylindrical extremity, less distinct than the lower pointed one, was surrounded by a thin dark cloud."

Mention of an odd cloud brings us back to Daniel Léger's sighting in 1941, but Nordstern's sighting did not include any accompanying German aircraft. The account continued with more strangeness:

"The machine flew horizontally. Maintaining its vertical position, from the north-west to the south-east. However, when approaching Chartres, it made a slight turn towards the south and then suddenly ascended vertically at terrific speed and disappeared. At this moment a second object appeared, identical in form but flying a good deal higher. It was following approximately the same course as the first one and then made the same slight turn to avoid Chartres and disappeared in the same direction as its leader."[792]

As these cases suggest, Allied and Axis military personnel were therefore not the only sources of reports regarding strange flying objects during WW2, as civilians witnessed them as well. However, the high volume of sightings by airmen can be explained by the huge numbers of flights that were taking place by day and night over the Continent, which increased again once Allied forces landed in Normandy in June 1944.

Chapter 9:
The *Ostfront*

A flying disc, with a metallic and shiny aspect, and which appeared stationary at high altitude, seemed to observe the engagement between German and Soviet fighters….

- Account of an object overhead the battle of Krasny Bor in 1943.

If anyone thinks that mysterious objects were confined to the Allied theatres of operations, then the following reports that took place on or near the *Ostfront* ("Eastern Front") will show that the phenomenon was noted in eastern Europe at around the same time, and as the first case demonstrates, as early as the middle of 1940. Talk of strange objects in the skies had already occurred in the region. In 1937, the *Fortean Society Journal* (which went by the catchy title of *Doubt*) included reports of flying "swords" and "coffins" along the German/Polish border, but these were vague and unsubstantiated. [793] Such descriptions appeared to be in keeping with the political tensions of the time, particularly on the Nazi side of the divide, whose leaders were already looking to expand the *Reich*. In his book *The Flying Saucers Are Real*, Donald Keyhoe quoted a conversation he had with "a well-known aeronautical scientist", who he had given the pseudonym "Paul Redell". "Redell" provided hints of possible early German involvement:

"Some top Nazi scientists were convinced we were being observed by space visitors. They'd searched all the old reports. Some sighting over Germany set them off about 1940." [794]

The aerodynamicist thought that these scientists had looked at developing oval and circular-shaped flying machines on the strength of such reports.

1967 saw a rather large UFO “flap” in Hungary. In the edition of the Hungarian newspaper *Tükör* dated 19th September of that year, journalist Ferenc Szakaly alluded to the similarities he had observed between stories of the sightings he was writing at that time and the articles on strange flying objects that he wrote back in 1940. He quoted an extract from his article published by the newspaper *Kis Ujsak* on 18th August 1940:

"An interesting aerial phenomenon in Bata. A few days ago, news spread in the region that the ‘snoring sleeper’ was back. The local peasants described a kind of fiery cartwheel which flew along the steep slopes with a terrible crash. Four years ago, such sightings had already been reported. Officially, it is reported that it acts like ball lightning, but the local inhabitants don't believe it. This strange spectacle is familiar to the women who are busy along a small tributary of the Danube. The phenomenon moved at an enormous speed and descended towards the bottom of the valley.”[795]

An intriguing case centred on the city of Rostov-on-Don in 1941, but earlier than the German invasion that year. A strange “*letayushchiy obyekt bez krylyev”* (“flying object without wings”) “fell” onto Zelyony Ostrov (“Green Island”), situated in the middle of the River Don, in the heart of Rostov-on-Don. According to various reports, numerous truckloads of Russian soldiers recovered the crashed vehicle from the site, and it was apparently taken to a secret military facility elsewhere in the city before being transferred to Kapustin Yar after the war, where experiments were being conducted with captured V-2 rockets from the summer of 1946 onwards.[796] The Soviets apparently believed it was a *Luftwaffe* reconnaissance aircraft on a spying mission, although Rostov-on-Don was over 370 miles (600km) away from anywhere the Germans could have taken off from at the time, and this would have involved a long flight over Russian territory.

Another reported case from Byelorussia in 1941 suggested a strange craft had crashed between the villages of Goszevo and

Dubrovki, about 50km south-west of Vitebsk. The wreckage was supposedly retrieved by troops belonging to the *Narodny Kommissariat pau Vnutrennim Delam* (NKVD, or "People's Commissariat for Public Affairs", the Soviet secret police), and transported to Omsk. However, this is on the other side of the Ural Mountains, near the Kazakhstan border in southern Siberia. I have not been able to find out much information regarding this case, although a photograph purporting to be of *"a downed craft found and recovered by Russians between 1940 and 1945"* can be found on the Internet.[797] At first glance it appears very interesting until the BMD-1 airborne amphibious infantry fighting vehicle is noted in the background. A smaller version of the more famous BMP-1, the BMD-1 was introduced into service in 1969. It is unclear whether the photograph is actually linked with this case, but as with many Russian cases which have come to light after the fall of the Soviet Union, I fear they should be treated with caution.

Some reports are so short and so vague as to be practically useless in adding to the sum of knowledge about the phenomenon. To give a couple of examples, near Kolka in Latvia on an unknown date in 1942, Vilus Stalte witnessed what he described as a "torpedo-shaped object" flying at a low altitude, possibly only 25 metres off the ground. The object was flying from south to north: he tried to follow it and watched it slow down to his running pace. Eventually, Stalte had to give up due to running out of breath. He claimed it made a high-pitched sound.[798] The description sounds like it was some sort of barrage balloon, but it would not have been travelling across the countryside unless it had become adrift, and of course such an object would be silent. Without further details, it is impossible to suggest what this was. Stalte later emigrated to the United States and claimed to have had another sighting in Arizona in July 1998.

In mid-August 1942, in the area of Tula, near Moscow, a huge cigar-shaped object, silver or aluminium in colour, looking like a Zeppelin but being described as much bulkier and more rounded at the front end, was noted in the sky. The exact date is not known,

although the witness's name is known to researcher Jan Aldrich.[799] The witness was an infantryman, whose son-in-law lived in Scotland. According to the witness's son-in-law, the object was seen at 2pm in the afternoon, on a day where only high altitude cirrus clouds were in an otherwise clear sky. He quoted from a letter sent by his father-in-law, which gave more details about the case:

"At that time, in the sky suddenly appeared a mighty cigar-shaped vessel that looked like a Zeppelin, however it was rounder and thicker at the front. It had a matt silver hue and remained stationary in the sky. No windows, portholes or passenger gondola could be made out. Particularly unusual was the complete noiselessness of the machine. The thing suddenly shot off with an incredible speed and was out of sight within seconds. All of this played out completely silently, and there were no contrails." [800]

According to the witness, around twenty of his comrades also saw the object. It was reported to their commanding officer in case it was a new Russian secret weapon. The "Zeppelin" was estimated to be around 300 metres long and possibly 100 metres in width, with a smooth-looking hull and no visible markings.[801]

One of the lesser-known divisions fighting against the Russians on the Eastern Front was one that was made up entirely of Spanish volunteers. Nicknamed the *División Azul* ("Blue Division"), but formally designated by the Germans as the *250. Infanterie-Division*, it fought initially on the Volkov River outside Leningrad and then participated in the siege of the city itself, taking part in a number of battles including one at Krasny Bor in early February 1943. On the 10th, the day the four day-long battle began, a group of soldiers taking cover in a log bunker from one of the frequent Red Air Force strafing attacks that day also noticed a "disc-shaped" object hovering above the enemy aircraft. It was as if the machine was observing what was going on below it. After several minutes, the object shot away at high speed and disappeared.

Unlike many of these accounts, the names of witnesses who were in the bunker were recorded. Oscar Rey Brea, who was a member of a communications unit, was apparently so moved by seeing the disc that after he returned to Spain later that same year, he started to collect reports of strange flying objects, effectively becoming the first Spanish ufologist. The other witnesses were listed as Jesus Arias, "Paz" and Tomas Carbonell. The mysterious object has also been described elsewhere as an "upturned bathtub" and a "barrel", whilst some websites also given the year as 1942, which is totally incorrect as the Battle of Krasny Bor took place twelve months later. An excellent source of information about the *División Azul* and the Krasny Bor engagement can be found in Gerald Kleinfeld and Lewis Tambs' *Hitler's Spanish Legion: the Blue Division in Russia in WWII*, published in 1979. It devotes around twenty pages to the opening day of the battle on 10th February 1943, but there is no mention of any strange flying objects, just repeated aerial attacks from the Red Air Force, together with *Luftwaffe* ground-attack missions against the Russians later in the afternoon.

Brea was born in 1923 and volunteered to join the *División* Azul, serving for two years in Russia before the unit was withdrawn from the front line on General Franco's orders. It seems that Brea's sighting at Krasny Bor first appeared in a book by Antonio Ribera titled *Encuentros con humanoids*, published in 1982. Ribera mentions that Brea, who had passed away before the book came out, saw *"a flying disc, with a metallic and shiny aspect, and which appeared stationary at high altitude, seemed to observe the engagement between German and Soviet fighters."* After a while, Brea and the other soldiers watched as the object departed at high speed.[802] The witness became interested in the UFO subject once he returned home to Spain and learned that his parents had witnessed a similar-looking disc that flew over La Coruña in 1945. There is, however, confusion regarding the Krasny Bor case. The Spanish UFO researcher Jose A. Galán informed me that *"there is significant confusion with this subject".* He believes that Brea was not

present, and his companions instead had reported seeing the strange object whilst in Russia.[803]

Wartime encounters do not usually include sightings of the occupants of strange flying craft. However, the second case involving Daniel Léger, who we have already come across in connection with the strange "carousel" in France, featured the "pilot" of a mysterious machine he accidently stumbled across in July 1943. Again, the information comes courtesy of Jean Sider's 1990 book *Ultra Top Secret: ces OVNIs qui font peur*, where the case takes up several pages.[804]

In 1943, Daniel Léger, like many Frenchmen of his age and status, was ordered by the Germans to join the *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (*STO*, or "Obligatory Work Service"), the forced-labour organisation which saw tens of thousands of civilians drafted into facilities located across Occupied Europe. The pseudonym he used when coming forward with his accounts in the 1980s, "S. Theau", was a play on the French pronunciation of the abbreviation "STO". Léger was part of the "class of 1942", which the Germans required to work in various armament factories and building fortifications across the *Reich* and in what was known as the General Government (the "Occupied Polish Zone"). In March 1943, he was sent to Gdynia, a port on the Baltic Sea coast near Gdansk, which at the time were referred to by their German names of Gotenhafen and Danzig. Along with workers drafted from Belgium and Holland, plus some from Italy and Spain who had actually volunteered for service, Léger helped to construct blockhouses and other defence positions around the local coastline.

After a few months working on the fortifications, Léger was informed that a butcher located in nearby Exelgroud, a small town near Gdynia, was looking for a clerk to replace her husband, a prisoner in the Soviet Union. He asked his camp leader for permission to attend an interview there, and he was allowed to travel there on 18th July 1943, a Sunday and therefore his "day off" from his work on the blockhouses. Without means of transport, Léger had to walk from his camp to Exelgroud, and in order to shorten the

distance, decided to go via the sand dunes along the coast. Reaching the top of one of the dunes, Léger saw a rather strange sight:

“In the hollow in front of him, there was a bizarre metallic device, grey-aluminium, which was sunk into the dune in front of him. The object also seemed to have part of its base buried in the sandy soil.”

He noticed that the machine was flat and rounded and crouching next to it was the silhouette of a person. This individual was trying, somewhat awkwardly, to clear away by hand the sand that was covering the buried section of the craft. As he drew closer, Léger realised that the person was a woman, with blonde hair that covered her shoulders.

Léger’s first thought was that this was a *Luftwaffe* aircraft and female test pilot. He had seen female pilots at the airfield at Exelgroud and female personnel at the nearby Kriegsmarine base, *“including technicians developing and carrying torpedoes for submarines at the base, etc.”* He stopped himself getting too close in case the woman became annoyed at his presence, but as soon as he did so, she turned to look at him, almost as if she knew he was watching her work. Léger descended the dune to stand next to her, and found that she was rather tall, at least 1.75 metres in height – and taller than himself. She was dressed in a brown one-piece jumpsuit, which was devoid of pockets, buttons, zips or any badges. After the war, when Léger saw pictures of the celebrated French deep-sea diver Jacques Cousteau, he believed his diving outfit to look very similar. Léger was able to describe the woman’s features in detail:

“[Her] face was made up of regular features. The skin was white, but oddly enough, the eyes were slightly slanted like those of Asians. The blond hair fell freely in the back and was combed with a parting in the middle of the head.”

Her hands looked *“like the hands of a pianist”* and she wore a belt some ten centimetres wide and of the same shade as her jumpsuit, which was fitted with a flat, square silver buckle. The pilot wore no visible jewellery or watch. She did, however, start talking in a language that Léger could not understand. As he had been working around the Gotenhafen area for several months, he could recognise German and Polish, but she was not speaking either language. He did not believe that it was Russian either, as the sounds largely consisted of vowels and diphthongs. After the war, Léger visited Tahiti and thought that the islanders’ language was the closest he had come across to date, although it was still nowhere near the same as he had heard back in July 1943.

The strange device was described by Léger as looking like a “colonial hat”. After it had taken off, he noticed that it was formed by two separate parts, two plates stuck together. Measuring about six metres across and two metres high, several small, square-shaped portholes were located over the upper portion of the craft, although he was not sure how many there were in total, as he could only see the upper part of the machine whilst it was partially buried in the sand. There were no markings on the craft’s surface. In fact, there were no marks of any kind at all, not even rivets, bolts or joints, apart from a dark line which marked out two “rings” that formed the edges of the two “plates”. Léger could not make out a door or hatch around the visible portion of the device’s hull.

Whilst Léger could not understand a single word of what the pilot was saying to him, he had the distinct impression that she understood him perfectly, despite him speaking in French. She resorted to hand gestures, and he realised she was asking him to continue clearing away the sand from the buried section of the machine. Léger, a forced labourer used to taking orders from Germans and obeying without question, did as he was instructed. Some ten minutes later, he had finished, and the pilot started to smile at him, although this soon turned to annoyance when she began speaking again but he still could not understand what was being said.

“Finally, she pointed to the sky with one hand, then tapped her chest two or three times with her palm and did the same on our man's. She then placed one of her hand on the buckle of her belt (...) Immediately, a rectangular opening was made in the lower part of the device. It happened as follows: a panel took shape in the hull which was absolutely smooth before; this panel moved back a few centimetres inside the object then moved on one side as if it were sliding.”

After making a hand-gesture that Léger understood to mean “keep back”, the pilot entered the machine and the door closed on its own, the hull of the device looking as smooth as it had done beforehand. There was no visible sign that a doorway had even existed. He could now see through one of the portholes and obtained a brief look inside the machine. Léger saw that it was largely devoid of equipment, but what was even stranger was that the pilot was *“placed ‘on all fours’ in the center of the apparatus, or rather in a recumbent position, like that of a competition motorcycle rider.”* Léger began to hear a slight hum and stood back as the two “rings” around the machine’s centre, the “edges” of the “plates”, began to rotate:

“The dark line that separated them became bright and the structure began to vibrate, the more the craft began to rise, at first slowly to accelerate then sharply, moving away towards the north at a speed higher than the German fighter aircraft of the time, and quickly disappeared into the distance.”

Despite his belief that the machine belonged to the *Luftwaffe* and had possibly come from Peenemünde, the craft took off in a different direction. The testing centre was to the west, not the north, although of course the pilot may have wished to fly out to sea before heading for base in order not to attract further attention.

Even before arriving back at his camp, Daniel Léger had decided that it was best not to tell anyone about what he had encountered in the dunes near Exelgroud. Whilst most of his colleagues were

forced-labourers like himself, several were volunteers from countries allied or on friendly terms with the Germans, and if word had got out that he had stumbled across a secret, experimental *Luftwaffe* fighter aircraft, there was a good chance that he would end up in the hands of the *Gestapo* (*Geheime Staatspolizei*, or "Secret State Police"). Léger's father died the following month, and the young forced-labourer was allowed to travel back to France to attend the funeral. Not wishing to return to Gotenhafen afterwards, he went into hiding, knowing that the Germans could not threaten his father as a method of coercion. After the Liberation of France in the summer of 1944, Léger found a job in a USAAF workshop, staffed largely by airmen who were declared unfit for flying duties due to injuries sustained in combat. He was told by two former bomber crew members, both machine-gunners, that their aircraft had been followed on several occasions by non-aggressive, luminous disc-shaped devices. The former aircrew believed they were Nazi secret weapons:

"He spoke of his Gdynia sighting to a Master Sergeant Chappedelaine, an American non-commissioned officer of Canadian origin who ran the workshop."

Chappedelaine informed the colonel commanding the unit about Léger's story, but it appears that no further investigation was carried out. The Frenchman joined the Renault company in 1945 and retired in March 1982.

Some years after the war, Léger learned of the existence of the *Luftwaffe* testing airfield at Peenemünde, and of the rocket research which had also been carried out at the same location. He also read about *Flugkapitän* Hanna Reitsch's flights in the Me 163 *Komet* and her testing of the Fi 103R-IV *Reichenberg* (the piloted version of the V-1 flying bomb, referred to incorrectly in Jean Sider's book as the "V-4").[805] Reitsch had been involved in several tests with the R-IV, including some air-launches from beneath the wings of specially-adapted twin-engined Heinkel He 111H-22 bombers. This information led Léger to believe that he had seen a totally new type of *Luftwaffe*

fighter aircraft, one being tested by a colleague of Reitsch's, since he had seen pictures of her, and "his" female pilot looked very different. When details relating to the purported "V-7" circular-wing device started to appear in science periodicals that included news about the flying saucers, plus tales of suspected post-war Nazi bases in Antarctica, Léger's views about what he had seen in Poland were only reinforced. When news of strange flying vehicles in terms of possible extra-terrestrial contact started to appear, he began reading as many French-language UFO books as he could get his hands on:

"Since then, he was divided between two feelings, and associated the episode with two possible solutions: a revolutionary Nazi aircraft tested by a female Luftwaffe pilot, and a "flying saucer" and its alien pilot."

Léger apparently maintained until his death that he believed the Germans could have constructed a circular-winged flying machine, but possibly only a handful of prototypes due to the intensive Allied bombing of their industrial sites.

Léger forged links with early French Ufologists in order to try and find out whether similar encountered had occurred but chose not to divulge his own story to them as he saw the negative reaction that other witnesses had received:

"It was only in the mid-1980s that he decided to respond to the call of a ufologist, about an opinion poll on the UFO phenomenon. He took advantage of this occurrence to briefly report his sighting of 1943 (…)."[806]

However, it took an exchange of letters with Jean Sider in 1989 to bring out the full details of both of his encounters. Sider believed that Léger, then 67 years old, was mentally sound, and his story was coherent and consistent.

The first time that Léger's story appeared in an English-language book was in Timothy Good's 1998 book *Alien Base*, where both the

Raineries and Exelgroud encounters were listed. As the witness had died prior to publication, Good also gave his real name, Daniel Léger.[807] There has been plenty of scepticism shown over the two reports since that time, and I admit when I initially read the accounts, I felt that they sounded too good to be true. In preparation for this book, I decided to do a little more digging to see what I could find out, since I already had some concerns with some parts of the witness's description in the Raineries case listed in Chapter 8.

I was already aware that some commentators were sceptical of Léger's tale due to there being no location called "Exelgroud" in the Gdynia area. An area north of the port was called Hexengrund by the Germans during WW2, and this is the most likely location for Léger's story. It was renamed Babie Doły by the Poles after the war. A small *Luftwaffe* airfield known as *Fliegerhorst Hexengrund* was situated there, which was expanded and modernised by the post-war Polish Air Force as Oksywie airbase. In addition, a *Luftwaffe* air-dropped torpedo testing facility known as *Torpedowaffenplatz Gotenhafen-Hexengrund* was situated on the coast, just east of the airfield. The torpedo range was just offshore, a huge observation block being built about 500 metres out in the bay. Sub-variants of the single-seater Fw 190F fighter, designed to carry torpedoes, were based at Hexengrund for trials over the bay.[808] The section of Léger's story that mentions the *Luftwaffe* airfield and the naval base therefore appears to be true, and his belief that the strange device was an experimental aircraft would make sense, at least at first glance. This suggestion is given credence due to the fact that Peenemünde was only 260km to the west. As an STO worker, Léger was certainly not privy to everything that was taking place either there or at Hexengrund. He would have had no idea about the secret testing of jet and rocket-powered aircraft at Peenemünde-West, nor the V-1 flying bomb and V-2 rocket trials. Sider's book also contains photocopies of the Frenchman's identity papers whilst he was working for the STO, so it would appear that this side of his story is also true at least.

But what of the female pilot, who Léger initially believed was a colleague of the famous German aviatrix, *Flugkapitän* Hanna Reitsch? A contemporary of hers was Melitta Schenk Gräfin von Stauffenberg, the second woman to be awarded the honorary title of *Flugkapitän*, and the sister-in-law of Claus von Stauffenberg who planted the bomb that nearly killed Adolf Hitler in the 20th July 1944 plot. However, she was dark-haired and of average height, so did not fit Léger's own description. Another famous German aviatrix was Elly Beinhorn, who carried out daring solo flights to Australia, and across Africa and South America before the war, but she was not blond either, or even tall.[809] Undoubtedly there were other female German pilots at that time, however test pilots were feted by the Nazi regime for propaganda purposes and anyone fitting the French witness's description would surely have been identified by now.

Finally, there is the question of the machine itself. Whilst Léger believed that it most likely came from the *Erprobungsstelle* at Peenemünde once he had found out about it in the post-war period. However, no such aircraft (experimental or otherwise) tested at the airfield fits his description of the mysterious device. Although the purported "V-7" has been put forward as a possible candidate (and is included by Timothy Good in his analysis of the case in *Alien Base*), there are numerous reasons why it cannot be considered. A full description of this rumoured machine, together with these reasons, will be explained at length in the next chapter .

Once the "Iron Curtain" was torn down at the end of 1989, and *glasnost* broke out across the former Soviet Union, the previously trickle of UFO reports became a torrent, and some related as far back as WW2. For many years, the official Communist line was that UFOs simply did not exist, and to speak of them openly, or to try and publish magazines or books on the subject, was to invite trouble from the authorities. As the media was tightly controlled, it was also impossible to write articles for the newspapers discussing or reporting sightings. However, once the restrictions were lifted in post-Communist Russia, some unscrupulous people no doubt realised that fake UFO reports, documents, photographs and film would be a

quick way of obtaining money from naïve Westerners interested in the subject. A documentary called *"The Secret KGB UFO Files"*, hosted by Roger Moore, was shown on television a few times in the late 1990s/early 2000s and purported to show encounters with MiG-21 and MiG-23 interceptors. Those particular films have apparently been altered, as the original training films have been located, albeit without the CGI "flying cigars" included. I have my own experiences of Russia just after the fall of the Soviet Union. I travelled around north-eastern Siberia in 1992 and saw at first-hand how dollars opened doors, even if there turned out to be nothing behind them. Therefore, I would urge readers to treat many of the reports that emanated from Russia in the 1990s with a good deal of caution, especially ones that lack dates, locations and witness names.

However, some reports do include some or all of these criteria. According to *The Soviet UFO Files*, written by Paul Stonehill and Philip Mantle, and published in 2010, there were several sightings made by Russian ground forces during WW2. The Kursk salient was the scene of a huge battle in July and August 1943. First, the Germans initiated *Zitadelle*, a two pronged attack from the north and south of Kursk, designed to cut off Russian forces in the salient, which lasted for two weeks in July. The Soviet forces then counter-attacked with Operation *Kutuzov*, which saw their armies tear into the rear of the northern German advance. The world's largest ever tank battle took place at Prokhorovka on 12th July 1943, involving around 900 armoured vehicles in total. According to Stonehill and Mantle, in August 1943, as the Russians were gaining the upper hand, *Starshy leytenant* ("Senior Lieutenant") Nady Zhelaginov was watching the skies for *Luftwaffe* ground-attack aircraft following a Russian artillery barrage directed against German forward positions located somewhere in the Kursk salient. Suddenly, he spotted a "sickle-shaped" object, dark-blue in colour with a bright orange middle section. Zhelaginov described it as looking like a "great dolphin", as the mid-section was constantly expanding and contracting as it moved through the air in a south-westerly direction. The witness thought it was an impressive sight, moving across a background of shell bursts and other explosions. Apparently, a

signed report of the sighting exists, together with the names of other witnesses. However, I have been unable to find a copy of this.

Details of another sighting in the same area, which occurred just before *Zitadelle* began, was located in the files of Professor Felix Ziegel, who was regarded as "the founder of Soviet Ufology". Ufology did exist in the Soviet Union, but operated "underground" to a large extent, apart from a brief period in 1967 when the Communist authorities temporarily allowed public discussion of the subject. Apparently included among Ziegel's files was a drawing of the object that was made at the time and signed by a number of Soviet army colonels in order to verify its authenticity. However, no trace of the drawing can now be found, and there are no further details available.

The February 1989 edition of the German aviation magazine *Flugzeug* contained a report by an anonymous official, listed by some as a *Luftwaffe* pilot, who had allegedly witnessed a disc-shaped craft at Prag-Gbell (now known as Prague-Kbely) in either August or September 1943. He had visited *Flugzeugführerschule C 14* (FFS C 14, or "Flight School C 14") at the aerodrome on a Sunday when there were no training flights. According to his report, the witness was 200 metres away from the weapons store building when he noticed a strange object sitting in a hangar. The official (or pilot's) description appeared very precise:

"The device was inside a hangar; a disc, some 5 to 6 metres in diameter. Its body is relatively large in the centre. Underneath, it has four tall, thin legs. Colour: aluminium. Height: almost as tall as a man. Thickness: some 30-40 cm, with a rim of external rods, perhaps square orifices. The upper part of the body (almost a third of the total height) was shrunken over the upper half of the disc. It was flat and rounded."[810]

The witness then claimed that the machine was brought out of the hangar. In addition to hearing the roar from its engines, he saw the external "side" of the disc begin to rotate. With this, the vehicle began to move slowly in a straight line towards the southern end of

Prag-Gbell aerodrome. It then rose about a metre into the air and proceeded to fly around 300 metres around the field at the same altitude. The device finally landed, albeit awkwardly, and was pushed back into the hangar. He also claimed it had flown again later the same day.

Whilst the witness apparently wanted to remain anonymous, he listed the names of several colleagues that were present at Prag-Gbell when the disc-shaped craft flew. *Gruppenfluglehrer Oberfeldwebel* Michelsen was flight instructor for the group, plus a couple of instructors and seventeen student pilots. Assuming some of the twenty named individuals survived the war, none have ever been traced or have come forward to confirm the anonymous official's claims. Even the *Flugzeug* editor was sceptical about the claims, suggesting they were similar to those espoused by those who had contacted newspapers in the 1950s saying they were involved in flying disc projects. We shall look at these people in another chapter.

Doubt, the *Fortean Society Journal*, was the source of a further report about a strange object witnessed over Romania. *"A large light with a tail, resembling a comet, was observed in Transylvania in September 1943. It was visible for five minutes. Witnesses reported that the head dissolved, and the tail took the shape of a scimitar before vanishing."*[811] The source of the story was not revealed but a comet or bolide would seem to be a reasonable explanation for such a sighting. However, the period of time that the object took to disappear seems too long for these phenomena.

A further story from Poland relates to a sighting which occurred during the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944. Zenon Sergisz, a resident of Kruczej, witnessed a *Luftwaffe* bomber flying over the capital. He also noticed three objects high in the sky, which appeared to be motionless. A few seconds later, they descended quickly, disappearing from view behind buildings. Sergisz and others with him watched as they then shot diagonally upwards into the air, assuming a position underneath the German aircraft. All three were

found to be roughly spherical in shape, although flattened somewhat, *“between a lens and a coin, much smaller than the plane.”*[812]

Lev Petrovich Ovsischer, a highly decorated pilot-navigator who flew Soviet bombers in 1944, reported his own sighting which took place near Warsaw in November of that year. The Russian advance into the city had been halted by Stalin on 1st August, allowing the Germans to contain and eventually defeat the brief Polish Home Army uprising that began at the same time. By November, the Soviets had forced a number of bridgeheads over the River Vistula on both the north and south sides of the Polish capital, but at that time made no moves against the city itself. Ovsischer and several colleagues watched a bright, strange-looking object flying above an airfield in what was described as *“the fire zone of the Warsaw area”*, so presumably near the front line, 25km east of the capital. They stated it was stationary for around fifteen minutes, at a high altitude, before ascending even further and eventually disappearing.[813]

In 2000, retired Colonel Gherman Kolchin published an article in the magazine *невероятное, легендарное, очевидное* (НЛО, or “Incredible, Legendary, Obvious”), which dealt with UFOs and the paranormal. Kolchin reported that a Lt Col A. Kovalchuk had witnessed something resembling a dirigible, measuring between 100-150 metres long, had overflown the airfield where he was based. Although it was believed to be a Zeppelin of some kind, it had no gondola or cabin, and was flying at an altitude of around 500m. The airfield defences started to open fire with their 37mm anti-aircraft cannon and machine-guns, but these had no effect. The object continued on its trajectory and disappeared into the distance. No dates or locations were provided. One wonders why the Germans would have been sending such a flimsy machine into the teeth of the Russian defences, and why anti-aircraft guns had no effect on a Zeppelin-type device.

Flying Saucer Review Vol. 15 No.1 (January/February edition 1969) included a case which occurred in Romania during the summer of 1944. They were supplied to a Swiss newspaper by Ion Hobana, a Romania researcher who also included the sighting in his

1972 book with Julien Weverbergh, *UFOs From Behind the Iron Curtain.* Although the date was not given in either publication, it occurred on the same day that the Vega oil refinery north of Ploiesti was raided by American bombers. Later the same afternoon, engineer Grigore Zmeuranu was at the site, presumably helping to assess the damage caused by the attack. Together with a colleague, known as Farmache, he noticed a yellow, pointed object approaching from the north, which was shaped like an elongated tube with rounded ends, with a ball-shaped appendage fixed to one end. According to the witnesses, the object left a trail *"like a white tail, but not shedding any light"*, somewhat similar to a high-flying bomber although this was far shorter and appeared to be "vibrating". Zmeuranu estimated its speed to be three or four times that of the usual aircraft he saw flying over the area. Both men watched it fly around the bombed refinery and then depart in the direction it had arrived in. The engineer thought that the sighting had lasted for fifteen minutes and was convinced it was some sort of secret weapon, having ruled out cloud formations, aircraft, or celestial phenomenon.[814]

B-24 Liberators from the 15th Air Force based in Italy did bomb the Concordia Vega oil refinery on several occasions during the summer of 1944, during a four-month long campaign conducted from bases around Foggia in Italy against the refinery complexes in and around Ploiesti in Romania. The American raid on 24th September 1944 almost completely destroyed the Concordia Vega facility. It is therefore impossible to pin down the date of Zmeuranu's sighting without more information. The description of the object defies attempts to identify it, as none of the secret weapons projects resemble what the engineer stated he saw.

Another report connected with raids on the Romanian refineries appeared in 1994, courtesy of a Network First documentary on UFOs. Further details were included in Timothy Good's *Need to Know* in 2006. Again, however, the witness could not pin the sighting down to a definite date or even the month. Boris Surikov, a retired Major-General of the Soviet Air Force, provided details of his sighting

to the TV crew. In 1944, he was part of a bomber crew (type of aircraft unknown but could have been either a Petylakov Pe-2 or a Tupolev Tu-2) that was sent out to raid oil refineries in Romania. His aircraft was commanded by a Major Bajenov. According to Surikov, they were flying at an altitude of 5000 metres over south-western Ukraine when a large, elliptical-shaped object flew towards them. The documentary's narrator took up the story from this point, translating the retired Major-General's own words:

"As it approached, it electrically charged their bomber, threatening a massive fuel explosion. To save the plane, they jettisoned the bomb load, but reported their mission a complete success for fear of reprisals."[815]

Surikov drew the object for the cameras. His sketch showed something like an elongated top hat, with what he described as "rays of fire" emanating from the bottom end. Part of the object was reddish, the remainder was "light", and it was travelling at a great speed, lighting up the air around it. Surikov described it as looking like a "miniature sunset". At the lower centre of the "hat", there was a small flying object. He insisted it did not look like *flak* bursts, which were on the order of around four or five metres across. This, he stated, was much larger and longer than even the Russian *Buran* space shuttle, possibly even twice as long.[816]

The aircraft, which Surikov stated weighed 14.5 tonnes (presumably with its bomb load), started to shake when the crew encountered the object, and the engine oil pressures began to increase. He noticed a strong electro-static charge as he put his head next to the cockpit windows. Even after the object had passed, the wings of his aircraft were covered in electrical discharges. Surikov stated that by this stage, *"the whole plane was fluorescent, and the wings were glowing like a rainbow."* Long after the war, when Major-General Surikov was serving with the Soviet Union's Strategic Rocket Forces, he asked a group of Russian scientists for their opinion on the phenomenon. He was told that it was possible that the

UFO may have ionised the atmosphere due to its exotic propulsion system, and this would have affected his bomber in the way he had reported. The suggested electrical interference is reminiscent of the claims made by an Italian author who commentated on the “Foo Fighters” in a 1968 book, but we will look at this in a separate chapter.

Surikov’s case is interesting in that it comes from a retired high-ranking Soviet military officer, in this case one who had responsibilities for the Russian nuclear arsenal during the Cold War. My attempts to trace Major Bajenov have failed to turn up anything beyond references to this case. It is possible that it was a misspelling or mispronunciation, as there were officers by the name of Bazhenov serving during WW2. However, the year of the alleged raid on Romanian oil installations is problematic. Bombing attacks on refineries at Ploiesti and other locations in the country were certainly carried out by the Soviet Air Force in 1941, although they involved limited numbers of aircraft and were generally believed to be ineffectual. The Russians did not carry out many more long-range bombing raids and indeed never possessed a truly strategic bomber force, unlike the British or Americans. Their air force existed in order to support the army in a tactical sense, in the same way that the *Luftwaffe* supported the German front-line forces. By 1944, the Soviet Air Force was totally engaged in attacks that directly supported the Russian advance, which precluded the diversion of crews and aircraft to attack targets which were better left to the Western Allies who had much more capable forces based in Italy.

A further Romanian sighting occurred on a more definite date, 31st May 1944. At Pâncota, 20km north-east of Arad, Gheorghe Lucaci was watching what he believed to be a *Luftwaffe* aircraft flying over the area where he lived. To his amazement, he saw the machine stop in mid-air and remain motionless for two minutes before continuing on its journey.[817] The Germans certainly had two different models of helicopter in service at that time, if not actually performing operational missions. Both were from the Focke-Achgelis design stable, one being the single-seat Fa 282 *Kolibri*

(“Hummingbird”) and the other the much larger Fa 223 *Drache* (“Dragon”), a transport machine which featured twin rotors mounted on outriggers. However, neither type was operated in Romania, so what the witness saw hovering in mid-air is unknown.

UFOs From Behind the Iron Curtain also carried a further sighting from 1944, this time an unspecified date “at the end of the summer”. The witness, François Panes, came forward in 1964 with details of the incident after reading about UFOs in his newspaper. The article had caused him to remember something he saw whilst living in the small town of Blovice, about 15km south-east of Plzeň in German-occupied Czechoslovakia. At around 1700 hours one afternoon that summer, Panes was in the Kamesko Forest, just north of the town, when he saw above him *“in the blue sky a cigar-shaped object glittering brightly.”* He initially wondered whether it was a German Zeppelin. *“Although it had a stabiliser, there was no propeller, rudder or wings. Its length seemed to be 100-150 metres, diameter about 50.”* Panes estimated that the object was flying at an altitude of about 5000m, and watched as it caught the sunlight, its sunny side being silver and the side in shadow blending in with the blue skies. As the witness continued to observe the “Zeppelin”, he noticed that it became *“more strongly lit up from beneath”*, where he believed the airship’s cabin would be. He watched as the strange object started descending towards the ground, although without any of its details becoming clearer. The silver side of the “Zeppelin” changed colour as it descended, turning more reddish and then yellow. Panes watched it coming closer for around seven to ten minutes, and then it changed course, climbing, and then vanishing. Panes was mystified as to why an airship should be flying in his locality.

“I did of course ask myself why the Germans should have brought such vulnerable, old-fashioned and obsolete such as these Zeppelins into the battle. I was familiar with the use of balloons as a means of defence, since I had often seen them – but they were quite a bit smaller than the thing I now saw.”[818]

A further strange story came from an Austrian correspondent, who wrote to the German researcher Gerhard Steinhauser in 1971. The witness, whose name was not listed, had served with a *flak* unit in Poland during 1944. In the autumn of that year, the alarm sounded, heralding the approach of yet another Soviet Air Force attack. Personnel responsible for locating aircraft and calculating their height and speed reported a fast-moving object, flying at 15000m (49,200 feet) and descending rapidly. This was unusual as no Russian aircraft were believed capable of reaching that altitude.

The single target came nearer, dropping down to 8000m (26,240 feet) and increasing speed. There were suggestions from the rangefinders that it was moving towards them at speeds in excess of 2000km/h (1,240 mph), although this again was beyond anything the Russians flew and possibly an exaggeration. The *flak* battery's 88mm guns opened up at the object as it descended to 2000m (6,560 feet). Even though it was much closer, observers could not make out any details beyond a vague round shape. Now within range of the unit's 20mm *Flakvierling* (quadruple anti-aircraft guns for low-flying aircraft), their gunners started firing too. The speed of the object made it difficult for precise aiming, but a few *flak* shells burst in close proximity as it approached. However, these had no visible effect. The device eventually turned and then disappeared into the distance, to the consternation of the sixty-five *flak* personnel belonging to the unit. Although they were shocked by the encounter, their experience was forgotten during the maelstrom of the final months of the war on the Eastern Front.[819]

Doubts have been expressed regarding this sighting as the unit's 88mm *Flak* 43 guns would have been unable to accurately track an aircraft travelling at the speeds quoted. Tests with a *Luftwaffe* Me 262 jet fighter demonstrated just how hard it was for the *flak* gunners to keep up with fast-moving targets.[820] Nothing else was known about the case and the witness wished to remain anonymous, although the tale had also been published in the *Tiroler Tageszeitung* prior to its inclusion in Steinhauser's 1971 book.

The multitude of sightings of strange lights and flying objects in the skies over Europe during WW2 clearly suggests that these encounters were not figments of the imagination. We will return to the phenomenon later, but in the meantime, let us turn our attention to various items that were allegedly responsible for these cases.

Chapter 10:
The Genesis of the Nazi Flying Disk Myth

If flying disks are in the skies, they were built in Germany, as developed under my orders and probably reproduced by Germans in chains in Soviet captivity.

- Dr Richard Miethe, quoted in *France-Soir*, 30th June 1952.

As a keen aviation enthusiast in my youth, one who focussed heavily on WW2 *Luftwaffe* types, mention of Nazi "Foo Fighters" or flying discs would have certainly piqued my interest. The 1970s BBC documentary series *The Secret War* had an entire episode devoted to some of the more obscure wartime secret projects (most of them German), but there was no mention of anything that could be construed as a UFO. The accompanying book went into more detail than the television programmes ever could, but there was still no mention of Nazi flying saucers.[821]

My first exposure to the possible existence of Nazi flying saucers stemmed from two books I acquired in the 1980s, the first being *German Jet Genesis* by David Masters. This large format hardback listed all of the operational *Luftwaffe* rocket and jet powered aircraft, plus those under development at the end of the war and many of the numerous projects that never got off the drawing board. At the end of this book, there were two pages devoted to "Projekt Saucer".[822] I had never heard of this before and was instantly and completely hooked.

Masters gave details of six separate saucer-shaped projects and mentioned four different aeronautical engineers in connection with them. These were Rudolf Schriever, (Klaus) Habermohl, (Richard) Miethe and Bellonzo. The latter was a misspelling of the name of Professor Giuseppe Belluzzo, scientist and former Minister of the National Economy in Mussolini's regime, who wrote an article published in the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia* on 24th March

1950 claiming that *"flying discs had been invented in Germany and Italy during the war."* The subtitle read *"Mussolini and Hitler took an interest in it - Today some great power is using the weapon for study purposes."* Stating he had been involved in one such project, Belluzzo suggested that one or more of the "great powers" was launching flying discs in the immediate post-war period in order to study them. Arguably the most interesting claim he made was that the original flying disc was an Italian project dating from 1942, which had been passed onto the Germans for them to perfect. Whilst unsubstantiated in terms of actual content, Belluzzo's article was possibly the first public statement to suggest the existence of a Nazi flying saucer project.

The six separate projects listed in *German Jet Genesis* were:

1) *A "flying top" designed and built by Schriever, which was allegedly test-flown in June 1942.*
2) *A larger version of the "flying top" that was designed in collaboration with Habermohl, Miethe and "Bellonzo" (Belluzzo), being constructed in 1944.*
3) *Another, even larger version fitted with "advanced jet engines", designed at the Bayerische Motoren Werke AG (BMW) factory located near Prague, purported to have flown as the "V-7" in early 1945, reaching 1,218 mph. Built at a factory near Breslau and reportedly captured by the Russians.*
4) *A 138-foot wide disc comprising adjustable wing surfaces in a ring around a central cupola, designed by Miethe and also purported to have flown as the "V-7" in February 1945.*
5) *A further Schriever-designed disc capable of 3,000 mph, with no further details beyond that it had been "rumoured to exist."*
6) *A Schriever "flying disc" looking more elliptical-shaped in the style of a "classic" UFO, published "as blueprints by the West German Government" although possibly only "inspired by" the designer's own wartime designs and with certain details "made safe for publication".*

Putting aside the claims about a disc flying and breaking the sound barrier, note the similarity between the third and fourth projects listed above. There was clearly confusion as to whether it had been designed by Schriever and Habermohl or by Miethe alone. Masters stated that this disc was reportedly almost ready for "operational use" when the factory near Prague was captured by the Soviets in May 1945. Readers will also note that there is confusion about where the disc was built. Was it at Breslau (now Wroclaw in Poland) or in Prague? *"Almost ready for operational use"* would suggest that this presumed prototype was at very advanced stage of testing, as German aircraft projects usually involved a small number of test examples that were assigned individual *Versuchs* ("experimental") numbers such as V1, V2, etc., but not to be confused with the V-1 flying bomb or V-2 rocket. If successful, they were followed by a batch of pre-production machines for more tests before the type was accepted for operational duties and put into production. Even in the final months of the *Reich*, when new jet aircraft types were being rushed through testing programmes, this long-standing procedure continued unchanged. So why were flying disc projects following a different path to the other aeronautical projects underway in Germany? The RLM assigned designations to aircraft of all types, but the discs that were allegedly built had no such classification.

Masters did not stand squarely behind the whole "Project Saucer" story. Indeed, his introduction to the book cautioned readers:

"It is quite possible that some descriptions are now a mixture of fact and legend, and that the reader is asked to approach some of the less fully described or more obviously revolutionary projects with this in mind."

The author stated that this aspect of weapons development was very sketchy and that any documents that related to the projects *"were probably either destroyed, lost or taken by the Russians when the war ended."* Of course, to a teenage aviation enthusiast eager to learn new details about German secret weapons programmes, this was pure catnip. However, even at that impressionable age, I could

not help thinking that it was all simply too good to be true. Other projects in the same book, ones which had not progressed beyond simple wooden proof-of-concept mock-ups or wind tunnel models, were clearly documented with photographs, whilst in subsequent years I have come across documents relating to other designs found among surviving records from German wartime aircraft companies or the great Allied technology hunt at the end of WW2. Unfortunately, the same wasn't true for the Nazi flying saucer projects listed in the book. It was hard to believe that not a single scrap of hard evidence existed then to support the existence of these "man-made flying discs". Nearly forty years after obtaining this book, this absence of proof still remains.

Back in 1982, I could not obtain corroboration for any of the saucer projects listed in *German Jet Genesis*, and yet I wanted to know more, even if it was simply to find proof that it was all a hoax. My next encounter with information relating to the Nazi flying saucer projects came courtesy of an unlikely source, namely the author James Lucas. In addition to being a wartime veteran and a prolific writer about the WW2 conflict, he was also Deputy Head of the Department of Photographs at London's Imperial War Museum. I either owned or had read eight of the ten books he had written prior to the release of *Last Days of the Reich* in 1986. The latter dealt with the Third Reich on the battlefronts in the Courland, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia from 1st to 9th May 1945.

My experience of his books was of a no-nonsense, factual approach to telling stories, peppered with anecdotes that put the reader directly into the middle of what was going on. It was therefore quite a surprise that in *Last Days of the Reich*, Lucas included mention of a "circular flying machine" in a paragraph tacked onto the end of a chapter dealing with the end of the war in the Central and Southern sectors. Although not listing his source of this information, he included the following:

"One group that were sought but not found by US agents were the engineers who had developed a circular flying machine around whose edges jet engines had been fitted."

Lucas conceded that information about this object was “scanty”. Here was a repeat of the claim that I had first come across in *German Jet Genesis* about the disc which had allegedly been flown in early 1945 and reached a speed of 1,800 mph. This machine would therefore appear to be either the Schriever or the Miethe project listed above. The author concluded by stating that if these tales were to be believed, the object and the engineers were last seen on the airfield at Prague, awaiting rescue just hours before the Soviets arrived. [823] Using the original German names for these airfields, this would have either at Prag-Rusin, Prag-Letnian or Prag-Gbell.

Up until the late morning of 8th May 1945, Rusin aerodrome (now Prague’s main airport) was still defended by elements of an SS training & replacement battalion, plus *flak* gun crews and ground personnel drafted as ad hoc infantry, so it was possible that a group of scientists, engineers, and technicians, together with a flying disc, could have been airlifted out at the very last minute. However, even if the *Luftwaffe* had been able to rustle up a handful of transport aircraft (and more importantly, the necessary fuel) to undertake such a rescue, there was the small matter of a huge battle that had raged across Rusin from early on the 7th until around lunchtime the following day, with the mixed SS and *Luftwaffe* force defending the site against heavy attacks from the Russian Liberation Army, made up of former POWs who had volunteered to fight for the Germans. The unit had recently changed sides to fight with the Czech partisans for the liberation of Prague.[824] Rusin had been home to a small *Deutsche Lufthansa* repair facility, but it had almost certainly been disbanded by May 1945 and its personnel transferred. Although Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighter-bombers belonging to two *Kampfgeschwaderen* (bomber wings) had operated from the aerodrome up until the last days of the war and therefore was a site where relatively advanced technology was present, both the ongoing battle and the devastation wrought by it meant that Rusin was almost certainly not the place from where a flying disc was retrieved.

Prag-Gbell (now Kbely, home to a very impressive aircraft museum which I visited back in June 1992) was the site of a pre-war Aero factory. Aero built parts for German aircraft manufacturers, including Junkers, and there was a small *Luftwaffe* repair facility on site. A project involving the construction and testing of a flying disc may have been able to operate from Gbell. It should be realised that a machine of the size suggested in *German Jet Genesis* would have had to be dismantled in order to fit inside the standard *Luftwaffe* Junkers Ju 52 or Ju 290 transports that were still nominally available for such a mission, as their cargo carrying areas were not wide enough. Transport aircraft with greater capacity did actually exist in the *Luftwaffe* inventory, but few if any of the multi-engined Arado Ar 232 *Tausendfüßler* ("Millipede") and Me 323 *Gigant* ("Giant") fleet were still in operational condition and available to undertake such a rescue mission. Huge machines such as these would have been hacked down by the Allied or Soviet air forces either on the inbound or outbound flights, and a large *Luftwaffe* fighter presence would have been required to defend a transport. Such aircraft numbers simply did not exist in May 1945.

Prag-Letnian (now Letňany) was the site of an Avia plant which built aircraft engines for the Germans, plus a Letov factory which manufactured spare parts, repaired airframes, and trained *Luftwaffe* technicians. The Aero company also had a facility on the site which built Siebel Si 204 twin-engined liaison aircraft under licence for the Germans. The three facilities were spread out over fourteen separate hangars. If a project had needed its own design, manufacturing, and testing facilities, Letnian would have been (on paper at least) the most likely candidate of the main three Prague aerodromes. The scant "testimony" offered in support of a disc being built or tested in the city does not support this conclusion, however, and this will be examined in a subsequent chapter.

Lucas concluded his paragraph with *"nothing more has ever been learned of the machine or the men since that morning in May 1945."* This was essentially a repeat of the story told in *German Jet Genesis*, albeit with a suggestion that the disc and its associated personnel had awaited rescue at Prague and not Breslau. I was

therefore no further forward, yet still wanted to know more about this potentially astounding facet of WW2.

Jumping forward several years, I came across further details courtesy of an even more unlikely source. A series of science fiction novels under the title *Projekt Saucer* were written by author W. A. Harbinson during the 1990s. The plot dealt with a mad genius who had been involved with the "mystery airships" in the late 1890s and had finally thrown in his lot with the Nazis, eventually hiding out in Antarctica with a fleet of German disc-shaped aircraft, continuing his plans after WW2. For the UFO enthusiast, there was the added attraction of various "famous" witnesses and events being thrown into the mix. Notes made by Harbinson at the time suggested he had based these books on research into actual Nazi flying saucers, and it wasn't long before he brought out his own non-fiction volume based on his findings, *Projekt UFO: The Case for Man-Made Flying Saucers.* This was released in 1995 and I managed to acquire a copy. I was still open to the possibility that the Germans had developed one or more flying discs in WW2, although the lack of evidence seemed to suggest otherwise.

Harbinson spun an elaborate tale but there was very little evidence to back up his claims that the Germans had built flying saucers and "Foo Fighter" type weapons beyond reference to two books, one of which was Renato Vesco's *Intercettateli senza sparare, La vera storia dei dischi volanti*. We will look at Vesco in Chapter 12. Harbinson also leant heavily upon information contained in a magazine called *Brisant*, a copy of which had allegedly been handed to him at a scientific conference in Hanover in 1978.[825] The latter included an article on highly-advanced saucer-shaped aircraft, which the unnamed author suggested had been built by German scientists during WW2 and which were the first of their type anywhere in the world. Simple three-view drawings, apparent reproductions of technical drafts, were also included although it was stated that the West German Government had altered some details to render them "safe for publication." This sounded rather familiar and echoed what was written in *German Jet Genesis.* To date no-

one has been able to come up with a complete copy of this magazine, and Harbinson's original copy was reportedly lost by his publisher. In fact, the *Brisant* publication does not appear to exist beyond the author's account. It joined a long list of "evidence" that miraculously disappears when researchers ask for such material to be produced.

Harbinson also included eight pages of illustrations, although some are drawings and plans, with only one "actual" grainy photograph of the "Foo Fighters". This image, showing a "blob-shaped" object between the triangular-shaped tail of one aircraft on the left and a similar machine in full on the right, is often used when discussing "Foo Fighters". In *Projekt UFO*, it is described as follows:

"Photograph of one of the 'balls of fire' or 'Foo Fighters' that harassed so many Allied pilots during the closing months of World War II, widely believed to have been a German secret weapon, the Feuerball, radio-controlled from the ground."[826]

Having seen this photo on numerous occasions in books and on websites, it struck me that very few appear to have identified the aircraft shown. As an aviation enthusiast with a particular interest in WW2, it was not difficult to see that both machines were Tachikawa Ki-36s. Their distinctive main wheel fairings, plus the narrow rear fuselages and triangular tailplanes were a bit of a giveaway. The Ki-36 (known to the Allies as *Ida*) was not a well-known Imperial Japanese Army Air Force type, so some leeway can be given to authors and websites that cover the "Foo Fighters". The Ki-36 would definitely not have been flying over Western Europe when the supposed *Feuerball* design is claimed to have been used. "Foo Fighter" sightings were made over in the Far East during WW2, but this is not what is being claimed here. Using a grainy image of two Ki-36 *Idas* together with a fuzzy "blob" and suggesting it is evidence of Nazi secret weapons, all without some basic fact-checking, made me question everything else Harbinson had written on the subject. It is even possible that the "blob" was simply a processing error when

the original film was developed. However, there were more pieces to the puzzle that did not seem to fit. One was a German author, noted for a book he had written in the late 1950s.

This book, and the second that Harbinson referred to, was Major Rudolf Lusar's *Die Deutschen Waffen und Geheimwaffen Des 2. Weltkrieges und Ihre Weiterentwickl* ("German Secret Weapons of the Second World War and their Further Development"), published in Germany in 1957 and later appearing as an English translation in 1959. Lusar seems to have been an interesting character, although the book gives no information regarding his background, let alone his military credentials, in terms of being an authority on secret weapons. Although apparently classing himself as an engineer by trade, his wartime service was as part of a *Flak-Division* ("anti-aircraft artillery division"), according to evidence that he gave to the 1962 French hearings into the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre in June 1944, based upon a chance encounter with the SS officer responsible for the incident.[827] Lusar does not appear to have named which *Flak-Division* he was serving with in France at that time. His name does not appear in a search relating to 13. and 16. *Flak-Divisions*, or any other anti-aircraft units. Elsewhere, he listed himself as being a member of the *Reich's* Propaganda Ministry, and also on the staff of the German Patent Office, where he supposedly had sight of information relating to the flying disc projects in addition to many other secret weapon programmes.[828] Lusar told the French hearings that he was a *Hauptmann* ("Captain"), but in the post-war period he instead claimed he was a *Major* of the Reserve Army.

There are also claims that Lusar headed the Technical Arms Department of the German War Ministry. As far as "German War Ministry" goes, the actual term is misleading as the department effectively ceased to exist in February 1938 when its role was taken over by the newly-created *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW, or "High Command of the Armed Forces"). The OKW acted as the *Reich's* military staff, co-ordinating the actions of the *Heer* ("Army"), *Luftwaffe* and *Kriegsmarine* ("Navy"). In practice, however, the system of control was even more fragmented as the *Luftwaffe* and

Kriegsmarine each had their own command staffs (namely the *Oberkommando der Luftwaffe* and *Oberkommando der Marine*), which exercised a fair amount of autonomy, even though they were theoretically subordinate to the OKW. The *Heer* also had its own command grouping, the *Oberkommando der Heeres* (OKH), responsible for strategic planning on the Eastern Front. The *Waffen-SS* had its own independent command structure, which was known as the *Kommandoamt der Allgemeine* SS ("General SS Headquarters"), itself part of the SS-*Führungshauptamt* (SS-FHA, or "SS Leadership Main Office"). Given this myriad of staff groups that comprised the upper echelons of the *Reich*, it is unclear which department Lusar was referring to when he mentioned the "War Ministry". However, with a little digging, a likely candidates appears.

Looking at the departments that were directly subordinate to *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH), there was the *Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres* (Chef H Rüst u BdE, or "Chief of Army Armaments and Commander of the Replacement Army"). Chef H Rüst u BdE was responsible for staff who acted as weapons inspectors. It also oversaw a number of inspection departments, each having responsibility for areas within the *Heer*. Apart from the *Inspekteur der Panzertruppen* ("Inspector of Armoured Forces"), there were also sections such as the *Allgemeine Heeresamt* (AHA, or "General Army Office"), and the *Heereswaffenamt* (HWA, or "Army Weapons Agency"). The HWA would seem to be a likely candidate. It had numerous inspection officials working for it and these personnel were awarded the rank of *Hauptmann* by the start of the war. It is therefore possible that Lusar could have been one of them, although it seems odd that a technical inspector of such rank would be transferred to a *Flak-Division*. Officers who were classed as inspectors of *flak* artillery troops were usually ranked as *Oberst* ("Colonel") or above, and often went onto command whole *Flak-Divisions* as the war in Europe reached its climax. There is also the matter of which branch of service Lusar actually belonged to. *Hauptmann* was both a *Heer* and *Luftwaffe* rank, equating to "Captain" in the former and "Flight Lieutenant" in the latter. *Flak-Divisionen* belonged to the *Luftwaffe* and whilst they

might have fought alongside and in support of the *Heer* on the battlefronts, they followed a different chain of command. Personnel were drawn from the *Luftwaffe* and therefore if Lusar did indeed serve with a *Flak-Division* in France, he would not have been a member of the *Heer*. So, as a *Luftwaffe Hauptmann*, Lusar would presumably not have been attached to the *Heereswaffenamt*, and therefore we must turn to the air force equivalent for a possible answer. This will also show just what kind of aerodynamical research was being carried out by the Germans during WW2.

The *Luftwaffe* possessed a complicated system of command, procurement, and testing organisations, some of which appeared to duplicate the actions carried out in other facilities. In terms of candidates for *Hauptmann* Lusar's alleged role in the "War Ministry", we first need to look at the *Luftfahrtforschungsanstalt* (the LFA, or "Aeronautical Research Institute") which was located in a forest just south-west of Völkenrode, a small village on the outskirts of Braunschweig.[829] Also referred to as the *Herman Goering Forschungsinstitut*, from its establishment in 1935 it was an extremely secret facility, with responsibilities for airframe, aero engine, and aircraft weapons testing. There were no less than three different wind tunnels for use by the *Institut für Aerodynamik* ("Aerodynamics Institute"), the first being completed in 1936, whilst the *Institut für Gasdynamik* ("Institute for Gas Dynamics") had two more, including one which could operate at three times the speed of sound. There was also the *Institut für Festigkeit* ("Institute for Strength"), which carried out static testing on airframes and components, plus the *Institut für Motorenforschung* ("Institute for Engine Research"), where powerplants could be tested at simulated high altitude, in a vacuum and under high pressure. The last LFA facility was the *Institut für Kinematik* ("Institute for Weapons Research") carried out weapons testing, one of their ranges using a wind tunnel which could be pressurised to again simulate high altitude. Working separately from the *Luftwaffe's* main *Erprobungsstellen* ("test centres") located at Peenemünde-West (Karlshagen), Rechlin, Tarnewitz and Travemünde, the LFA

consisted of around sixty buildings, all of which were camouflaged to blend into the forest they were built in.[830] As someone working in the "War Ministry" who may have also been a technical inspector, it is therefore possible that Lusar was attached to one or more of the above facilities, although if knowledge of secret weapons becomes the most important factor, then the *Institut für Kinematik* would be the most likely candidate.

However, there was one more organisation located at Völkenrode which dealt with secret weapons projects, and with some imagination could have been involved in the development and testing of a flying disc. The *Luftwaffe* operated a missile testing institute at the LFA under the cover name *Flugzeugprüfstelle Trauen* ("Aircraft Inspection Facility Trauen").[831] It possessed test benches for the static thrust measurement of rocket and ramjet engines, plus a small production facility for liquid oxygen (*A-Stoff*). Combined with an ethanol/water mixture called *B-Stoff*, this created rocket fuel for use in such missiles as the V-2 and *Wasserfall*.

However, in reality, *Flugzeugprüfstelle Trauen* was looking at a different weapons system. The facility's head, Eugene Sänger, was attempting to develop a sub-orbital, supersonic glider bomber known as the *Silbervogel* ("Silver Bird"), capable of reaching and attacking New York. One of a number of designs considered for development by the *Amerikabomber* project, it was to have been rocket-powered for the take-off section of flight. Take-off involved being propelled along a 3km-long metal monorail track by a huge 600 tonne thrust rocket engine that would fire for just eleven seconds (shades of the 1950s science-fiction disaster movie *When Worlds Collide*). At around 1200m and 1850km/h, the main 100 tonne thrust rocket would be started, propelling the craft to an altitude of around 145km, whereupon the main engine would run out of fuel, From that point, the *Silbervogel* would glide in a high-speed descent, "bouncing" off lower denser air layers in order to stay aloft. With a projected speed of around 22000km/h, it could reach the continental United States, drop a 4000kg bomb and then "skip" over the Pacific for a landing in Japan.[832] Post-war research into the calculations made at the time

by the *Flugzeugprüfstelle Trauen* team found that if it had ever flown, the 28m-long *Silbervogel* would have in all likelihood burned up on re-entry, as its heat shield was not thick enough. The project sounded about as believable as the prospect of flying discs, but a 1/20 scale mock-up of Sänger's sub-orbital glider was built before the project was terminated due to being far too complex to realise during the war.

If the concept of a wartime sub-orbital glider-bomber sounds ridiculous, then Stalin did not share those sentiments as he was apparently intrigued by reports of the project after the war. In the late 1940s he sanctioned the kidnap of Sänger and his design partner, Irene Bredt, a mathematician and engineer who worked on ramjets. By that stage, both were working for the France government. The Russian team searching Germany, led by Stalin's son Vasily, failed to find him or Bredt.[833]

Lusar is credited as being on the staff of the Patent Office, a *Hauptmann* in a *Flak* unit, a technical inspector, and also part of Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry. This appears to be a somewhat stellar career, achieved by an indispensable officer, and one would think that his name would be crop up in searches relating to the *Reich's* senior officials. His name always appears in connection with Nazi flying saucers, but no concrete information is ever provided with regard to what he actually did during the war. Lusar's motivation for writing a book dealing with German secret weapons is not understood, and if indeed he did have access to certain projects as a result of being a technical inspector, this was never actually mentioned. Instead, readers simply have to take on trust the details that were included, especially on flying discs.

Just two pages of Lusar's book are given over to the Nazi flying saucer projects, with a drawing of a flying disc but one devoid of much detail. This may well be the one that Harbinson claimed that the West German Government rendered "safe for publication". Lusar mentioned a machine designed by Schriever and Habermohl which had a *"wide surfaced ring which rotated around a fixed, central cupola or cockpit."* The ring itself consisted of adjustable "wing-

discs", but there was little explanation of how the system worked beyond the "fact" that they could be set for take-off and landing. He also claimed that Miethe developed a *"discus-shaped plane with a diameter of 42 metres, in which adjustable jets were inserted."* However, Lusar saved the best for last:

"Schriever and Habermohl, who worked in Prague, took off with the first flying disc on February 14, 1945. Within three minutes they climbed to an altitude of 12400 metres and reached a speed of 2000km/h in horizontal flight."

I was now convinced that I had found where David Masters had obtained his details regarding "Project Saucer" from. However, with no technical background in aeronautics or responsibility for any of the German secret weapons programmes during WW2 that can be proven beyond his claims, it is difficult to see how Lusar had managed to obtain such information. This is, at least, until Georg Klein enters the story, together with the added twist that the CIA were also involved. This has been cited by some as CIA involvement in German flying discs, but the truth is much less sensational.

A CIA report dated 27th May 1954 gave an account of an interview provided to the West German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* ("World on Sunday") on 26th April 1953 by Georg Klein, *"a famous German engineer and aircraft expert".* Klein claimed that he was a staff member of Albert Speer's *Reichsministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion* ("State Ministry of Armaments and War Production"). The interview described details of how he had been involved with the construction and testing of several "flying saucers" between 1941 and 1945. Klein had also apparently witnessed the purported February 1945 test flight of the Schriever and Habermohl disc.[834] No less than three separate designs were mentioned by Klein, one being the object test flown in 1945 and another the disc conceived by Miethe. These are the two listed in *German Jet Genesis* which have extremely similar "histories". Unfortunately, the third project is not described. The *Welt am Sonntag* article was titled

Erste 'Flugscheibe' flog bereits 1945 in Prag (“The first flying disc already flew in Prague in 1945”)[835]. Klein is pictured pointing at a rather simple drawing which bears a remarkable similarity to the one included in Lusar’s subsequent book.[836] He also went onto suggest that the disc had been destroyed before the Russians could reach the factory. Lusar concluded that Habermohl and his staff had, however, been captured by Soviet forces at the end of the war. It appeared to me as though he had simply taken Klein’s account as verbatim without doing any independent checks, some of which would have surely thrown up inaccuracies and falsehoods in the latter’s claims.

When I came across the CIA report, which has been reproduced on a number of websites, a couple of points had a hollow ring to them. Firstly, Klein is quoted as mentioning *“the Miethe factories, which had also built V-2 rockets”.*[837] Breslau is quoted as the location for these facilities. Dr. Miethe is usually listed as being involved with the development of the V-2 rocket; however, his name never appears in connection with the design, construction or testing of the weapon, let alone having even limited responsibility for missile production. Development of the rocket was carried out at the secret Peenemünde facility on the island of Usedom, off the Baltic Coast, and also at a test range near Blizna in Poland after the former was heavily bombed by the RAF, but Miethe’s name does not appear in connection with either location. It is true that various parts intended for the combustion chamber of the A4 rocket were manufactured at a plant in Breslau, but it was the Linke-Hoffman-Busch AG facility in the city rather than a “Miethe factory”.[838] It is possible that Dr Miethe worked there in a less prominent role, but once again this has not been confirmed.

A more fantastical claim comes courtesy of the quote that Miethe evaded the clutches of the Soviet armies *“closing on his factories at Breslau”* by *“escaping in a Messerschmitt 163”.*[839] This of course was the Me 163 *Komet*, the world’s first operational rocket-powered interceptor. As a supposed rocket engineer with no history of being able to fly, let alone pilot such a sophisticated and potentially lethal

machine such as the *Komet*, on reading Klein's statement I found it extremely unlikely that Miethe had escaped Breslau in a Me 163.

The city of Breslau was first surrounded by the Russians in February 1945 and a bloody siege ensued, continuing until the defenders finally surrendered on 7th May.[840] The fact that the Russians were besieging the city would have made it impossible for a Me 163 to fly in, as there was no "proper" airfield left in German hands. As far as I know, none were based at any of the pre-siege Breslau aerodromes, and in any case, given the nature of the fuels involved, it would have been virtually impossible to refuel one away from its "home" base, as special facilities and highly trained personnel were required to carry this out. In addition, there would have been the added complication of transporting two sets of highly volatile fuels into the city in preparation for the rescue flight.

A two-seat training version of the *Komet*, the Me 163S, did exist, although apparently only one was built, converted from a B-series airframe, and it is extremely doubtful that it would have been able to reach Breslau to snatch Dr Miethe from the hands of the Russians.[841] The Me 163S could only provide glider training, as in order to create the space required for the instructor's seating position behind the trainee, the rocket engine had been removed and the fuel tanks filled with water to simulate the weight of the fuel. In addition, the sole example was captured by the Russians at the beginning of May 1945. It was clear to me that there was practically zero truth in the supposition that Miethe flew or was flown out of Breslau in a Me 163 *Komet.* A rocket-powered interceptor taking off from the only airstrip left to the defenders, an improvised road "runway" in the middle of the surrounded city, would surely have been a story worth including as there would have been hundreds of witnesses to see such a sight.[842] A powered *Komet* launch could not have been hidden as the noise and smoke trail would have been noticed several kilometres away - and Miethe would have had to be flying it.

Some post-war researchers claim that the CIA report regarding Georg Klein is proof that the organisation was investigating German flying discs. It would be correct to say that they were certainly

interested in accounts of potentially valuable hardware or research that could have fallen into the hands of the Soviets. This would have been especially true in the early 1950s when the Russians had just exploded their own atom bomb and the Cold War was beginning to heat up. Klein's claims in *Welt am Sonntag* of scientists working on advanced technology that could have ended up in the Soviet Union after the war, would definitely have piqued the interest of CIA analysts. They would have then attempted to independently corroborate or refute his claims using other sources at their disposal. Klein's report is vague and riddled with errors. If as claimed, he had worked in Speer's staff, he presumably would have been aware of the Me 163's limitations and how it simply could not have been used in a last-ditch rescue attempt from Breslau. One of the fledgling helicopter designs under development at around the same time, such as the twin-rotor Focke-Achgelis Fa 223 *Drache* ("Dragon"), would have been a much more plausible rescue machine and the alleged use of a pre-production example would not have been as easy to refute, yet in the end still as unlikely.[843] Whilst I question his testimony, back in the 1950s others were prepared to believe him.

Lusar seems to have used Georg Klein's article in *Welt am Sonntag* for his flying disc details. But where did Klein, a purported member of staff belonging to the *Reichsministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion*, get his own information from in the first place? He lists three of the designers (Schriever, Habermohl and Miethe) as building flying discs and a fourth, Belluzzo, as a "Italian specialist" who he was corresponding with on the subject. The answer lies with three out of the four names, although as will be seen, none of them corroborate Klein's account by actually mentioning him in connection with the construction of German discs. He claims that his testimony is corroboration of their own accounts, however again there is no evidence to back this statement up. Without any proof being given, the reader is forced to accept Klein's own version of events. A clearly-defined pattern was emerging, and for someone who at first glance wondered whether the stories were true, when I finally reached this point, there were enough inaccuracies and falsehoods

in the overall story to suggest there was absolutely no truth whatsoever regarding Nazi flying discs.

More information appeared in *CRIFO Newsletter Vol.1 No.12* of March 1955, in a section entitled *"The Breslau-Peenemünde Puzzle".* Following a piece discussing whether or not the Americans were test-flying their own flying discs, Leonard Stringfield, the editor, stated that *"some theoreticians contend that Russia also has the saucer and that it had its beginning in Germany."* The unnamed sources claimed that both Riedel and Werner von Braun, both of whom had worked on the V-2 at Peenemünde, had also assisted in the development of a saucer, *"which began in 1942."* Stringfield also cited Jim Moseley of *Nexus* magazine, who the previous month had stated that an early prototype *"was released from Stettin and crashed in Spitsbergen and this model was built at Peenemünde where Riedel was a project engineer."* The editor repeated statements made by Georg Klein, who was described as a *"former German secret weapons expert, now an engineer living in Switzerland."* Klein had claimed that the Russians had captured a scale model of the "saucer" along with "top technicians" at Breslau. He also believed that Walther Miethe (another variation of Richard Miethe's name) was at that time working in the United States. Stringfield agreed with the view that designers had certainly moved to America and Russia to carry on their research but could not support Klein's claims that Germany had built a flying saucer during WW2.[844] Spitsbergen would feature in connection with the Nazi UFO myth just two months later.

However, one of the "founding fathers" of rocket propulsion and astronautics certainly believed in the existence of Georg Klein's (or should we say Rudolf Schriever's) alleged V-7 device. Professor Hermann Oberth, the noted physicist and rocketry expert who by the 1920s was seriously advocating the possibility of space travel and worked on the *Aggregat* series of German rockets during WW2, was sympathetic to the possibility of UFOs and of Klein's claims. In an article entitled *"They Come From Outer Space"*, published in Flying Saucer Review Vol.1 No.2 of May/June 1955, Oberth mentioned that

during WW2, the reports of strange luminous flying objects became more frequent, and that both the Allies and the Germans believed they were the other side's secret weapons. However, under a section titled *"Other Objects Mistaken For UFOs"*, the professor listed several possibilities, one which was the "V-7". He then wrote a fairly lengthy piece about this alleged project. He clearly believed that the device was not a flying disc, as the "V-7" is often labelled, but some sort of experimental helicopter. In an effort to prove this distinction, he described the machine in great detail, providing more information on the device, including its performance and flight profile:

"And I think that a German machine, the V7, and various modifications have been responsible for many UFO reports. At the end of the war, we [the Germans] developed first in Prague, then in Vienna, the V7 helicopter – this could easily have been mistaken for a Flying Saucer.

Instead of having rotor blades like an ordinary helicopter, the V7 had rotating tubes which released an 'exhaust' of flame. As the tubes rotated, the helicopter appeared to have a circle of flame round it, and at a distance it looked like a shining disc.

When it hovered, the flame was dark-red and dim. At higher speeds, the disc appeared lighter, and the flame looked yellowish, then white. At its highest speed, 4,000 ft/sec to 4,600 ft/sec, the V7 tipped over and flew on its side. A significant feature is that it was extremely noisy in flight and produced a thick trail in the atmosphere."[845]

Whilst the professor did not believe that the V-7 was responsible for UFO reports during the war itself, he was less forthcoming about how he had come by the details he included in his FSR article. Georg Klein's name cropped up in the same issue of FSR, when the editor of the magazine, Derek Dempster, mentioned his claims in connection with the "Foo Fighters of WW2". Dempster stated the following:

"That they were not German was proved to the satisfaction of the Allied Powers when they walked into Germany to dismantle the war factories. That they were not Russian was also established since there was a fairly cordial relationship between East and West at the time of Germany's collapse."

He then went onto discuss Klein himself:

"Professor Klein, who worked on V2s at Peenemünde, has stated that the Germans designed a Flying Saucer type aircraft during the war and that the plans and scale model had been taken over by the USSR."

Dempster wondered whether this would explain both the "Foo Fighters" and the post-war UFO reports, especially that given by Kenneth Arnold in June 1947. There was the question of how Russia could have reverse-engineered and built its own version of the "V-7", let alone fly nine of them over the Cascade Mountains. *"Nor would she have risked losing the secret by sending such a formation over the United States."* [846] In addition, why would the Soviets have constructed a huge fleet of MiG-15 *Fagot* jet fighters, when they apparently had a craft capable of such manoeuvres and speeds? The idea of the Russians capturing and building their own German discs made no sense, nor did the possibility of the Americans achieving the same feat, especially when they were still experimenting with rocket-propelled aircraft in an attempt to break Mach 2.

Further revelations soon appeared, although they emanated from a much more unlikely source, an unnamed Croat paper. A translation was apparently obtained by Gordon Creighton and published in *Flying Saucer Review*, Vol.1 No.3 of July-August 1955. It mentioned a German scientist by the name of Niels Kristiansen, who had supposedly escaped to Brazil after the war. There, he had revealed details of "German flying saucers". According to Kristiansen, *"secret trials took place at Stettin during the war, and a machine achieved a*

speed of about 1,300 miles an hour." The scientist's claim was reportedly substantiated by the Italian engineer Giuseppe Belluzzo, who we will discuss again shortly. In addition, in the 1950s, a French engineer was allegedly overseeing work on a similar machine based on "jet principles" by a German called "Magnus". However, there were no further details on the French disc design or regarding the hitherto-unknown German propulsion designer.[847]

The source also mentioned the claims made by Georg Klein. According to the Croat paper, two different factories were engaged in constructing flying saucers, one located in Breslau and the other in Prague. Klein himself was mentioned as working for the German "Ministry of Supply". He had apparently claimed that the flying disc trials had presented few new technical problems, the example being tested in early 1945 reaching 40,000 feet and capable of flying at 2,500 mph. According to Klein, special lightweight metals that provided both immense strength and heat resistance were required in its construction.

If this were not enough, the paper, presumably repeating Klein's various claims, went on to discuss the actual craft that had supposedly existed during WW2. Apparently, there had been no less than three separate designs. The first was a flying disc designed by Miethe, who, it was stated, had *"co-operated with von Braun on the V-2".* This machine comprised a rotating disc some 140 feet across, built around a circular cockpit. No less than twelve jet turbines were installed, located around the disc. The second was built by both *"Habermol and Schreiber"* [sic], both of whom we will investigate in more detail shortly. Their machine was apparently *"shaped like a globe and rounded by a ring"*, although there were no other details provided. The third was the most interesting of all, as it provided information on another design which occasionally appears on websites that deal with the subject of Nazi UFOs. The Croat paper stated the following:

"In April 1945, preliminary tests on a third prototype took place. It was known as a 'Flying Cigar'. It had a tremendous range and a

ceiling of about 40,000 ft. It was sent to Spitsbergen, whence it should have returned. But it crashed and was abandoned. It was later found by a Canadian naval unit and removed to Canada. German scientists went to Canada after the surrender to help reconstruct it."[848]

Why send a Nazi "flying cigar" to Spitsbergen? There was nothing there but ice and polar bears. Spitsbergen, or Svalbard as the Norwegians refer to their archipelago of islands situated halfway between the North Cape and the North Pole, had been the unlikely location for brief periods of combat during WW2. The Germans set up a series of weather stations on the main island, supplied by Heinkel He 111 and Junkers Ju 88 bombers in a transport role, landing on improvised runways made from alluvial gravel or on ice-covered lakes. Despite this, there was never any kind of secret German base on the archipelago. The weather station detachment lived a precarious existence in an extremely harsh climate, relying on the occasional parachute supply drop or if conditions allowed, a *Luftwaffe* aircraft to land and exchange personnel. Some were eventually rescued by a Norwegian fishing boat four months after the war had ended.

This, then, was the somewhat unlikely location of a German "flying cigar" crash during WW2. Or was it? Another story "doing the rounds" a few years before the Croat paper was featured in FSR in 1955, suggested that a UFO had crash-landed somewhere on Spitsbergen, although not during the war. News of this other crash first appeared in the *Saarbrücker Zeitung* newspaper and was published in its 28th June 1952 edition under the title *"Auf Spitzbergen landete Fliegende Untertasse"* ("Flying saucer landed in Spitsbergen"). It was odd that a German newspaper seemed to be the first to break a story about Norwegian Air Force jet pilots spotting a downed UFO over Spitsbergen during their "summer manoeuvres" over the islands in mid-June 1952. The author of the article signed himself as "J. M. M." but no-one has ever been able to work out his identity, or how the details of the incident came into his possession.

[849] However, as crashed saucer tales go, it was one of the most detailed, if no less unbelievable.

Four Royal Norwegian Air Force (RNoAF) jets, unnamed but either de Havilland Vampires or Republic F-84 Thunderjets, were allegedly heading for Nordaustlandet, the second-largest and most north-easterly island in the Spitsbergen archipelago whilst attempting to intercept aircraft that were acting as opponents in an air defence exercise. As they crossed over the Hinlopenstretet (the straits between the Spitsbergen "mainland" and Nordaustlandet, the radio equipment onboard all six aircraft malfunctioned at the same time, crackling sounds and "rustling noises" drowning out all attempts at communication between the unit's pilots. In addition, their radar systems were reporting the presence of a large object in close proximity. The jet fighters began to circle in an attempt to keep each other in sight, and it was during this manoeuvre that Captain Olaf Larsen looked down and spotted a large glittering metallic disc, some 40-50m across, sitting on the ice below them. Although there was some damage to the middle section of the object, he could make out the remains of a cockpit. Despite flying over the disc for the best part of an hour, the pilots did not see any signs of life. They elected to return to base to raise the alarm.

Several hours later, *"five big flying boats, equipped with landing skis"*, apparently took off for the site on Nordaustlandet. All landed safely on the ice next to the disc, which was described as being bluish-grey, sitting in a layer of snow and ice more than a metre thick. A Norwegian rocket specialist known as Dr Norsel had reportedly insisted on joining the expedition, and apparently worked out why the radios in the jet fighters had malfunctioned and their radar equipment had picked up a target. The disc had a *"radio-direction finder equipped with a plutonium core"*; it was undamaged and transmitting. According to Norsel, the strange metallic disc was *"undoubtedly one of the infamous flying saucers."* Measurements were taken and the object was thoroughly examined. It was apparently 48.88m across, round with slanting sides and was constructed from an unknown metal compound. No fewer than 46

“automatic jets” were installed around the edge of its outer ring, which rotated around a central ball which featured a plexiglass cockpit. The latter contained automatic measuring and control devices which presumably allowed the device to be flown remotely.[850] Was this the rumoured wartime German “flying cigar”?

Although this sounded almost too far-fetched for words, the article was saving the best revelation for last. The expedition reported seeing Russian symbols on the cockpit equipment. On learning of this story, Walter Riedel, chief designer of the V-2 rocket and also former head of the design office at the *Heeresversuchsanstalt Peenemünde* (“Peenemünde Army Research Centre”), reportedly stated *“that’s a typical V-7 on whose serial production I have worked myself.”* Was he really suggesting that a huge Russian disc, based on a German design, had crashed on the Spitsbergen archipelago? The story was subsequently reprinted in a number of German newspapers and was also mentioned in the aviation magazine *Der Flieger*. A number of books published shortly afterwards also included reports of the find, including Donald Keyhoe’s *Flying Saucers From Outer Space* in 1953 and Jimmy Guieu’s *Les soucoupes volantes viennent d’un autre Monde*, which was released a year later. Although just a function of their monitoring of potential Russian threats, the CIA also set up a file on the incident, simply mentioning *Agence France-Presse* reports that dealt with the story. But just how true was the *Saarbrücker Zeitung* story?

Stories often change in the retelling, and this one was no different. It subsequently appeared in newspapers and magazines published in Germany, Holland, the USA and Uruguay, each adding, changing or subtracting details. The jets were altered to a single flying boat, the Russian writing was said to be false, and even the location was moved to the island of Heligoland on the German North Sea coast in one account.[851] It was all very confusing. However, one basic fact remained. The story had never appeared in a Norwegian newspaper in June 1952, nor was it featured in the 1952 edition of the Spitsbergen newsletter, *Svalbardposten*. Why would

local newspapers not cover such a world-shattering story, and why did it not originate in a Norwegian publication?

Corroboration of a kind appeared at the Washington Press Club, an event in September 2010 involving Dr Stephen Greer's Disclosure Project. A group of former USAF officers challenged the 1968 Condon Report's verdict, which stated that UFOs did not pose a threat to national security. One of the panel members giving testimony to the journalists present was Lt Col. Dwynne Arneson, a retired communications officer who had been on duty at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana in 1967 when a UFO had hovered over one of the missile launch installations. He had read a classified message involving the sighting of the object. However, Arneson also stated that whilst serving as a cryptography officer at Ramstein AFB in Germany, he saw a message stating that a UFO had crashed in Spitsbergen.[852] In addition, this had occurred in 1962, not 1952 and certainly not during the war. A now declassified Air Intelligence Information Report does exist regarding a Spitsbergen crash, but it is dated 12th September 1952, and simply refers to an article about the alleged incident which appeared in the *Volksblat Berlin's* 9th July 1952 edition. Given that the report mentions Russian writing on the disc's instrumentation, it is no surprise that Air Intelligence wanted to know more about the machine.

RNoAF Vampires were based at Gardermoen, just north of Oslo, and had an effective range of around 1000km. Even if they had staged out of airfields much further north, they would never have been able to reach Spitsbergen and return to the Norwegian coast without running out of fuel. The distance from the North Cape to Nordaustlandet is 954km, so even operating out of Banak, the closest mainland base to Spitsbergen, the Vampires would have ran out of fuel almost immediately on arrival there.

By 1952, the RNoAF had received thirty F-84E and F-84G Thunderjets, which had a range of around 1610km. With external tanks fitted for ferry flights, this could have been doubled. However, even this may not have been enough to allow an aircraft to reach Nordaustlandet and return safely, let alone stooge around for an

hour before flying home. All of the F-84s were confined to airfields in the south of Norway in 1952, as upgrading work was being carried out on the ones located in the north to bring them up to NATO standards. Operational serviceability rates for the F-84E were not great, due to a shortage of spares for the aircraft's Allison jet engines, so it is unlikely that they would have been risked on long overwater flights. The F-84G Thunderjet was fitted with an inflight refuelling probe, although the RNoAF had no tanker aircraft of its own. This meant that one or more USAF Boeing KB-29 Stratofortresses or KC-97 Stratofreighters would have had to support the flight of six jets to Spitsbergen, presumably refuelling them once on the way out and again on the way home. In addition, the RNoAF did not operate "ski-equipped flying boats". Flying boats were not fitted with skis to land on the ice, as this would be left to "normal" transport aircraft such as the Douglas C-47 Dakota, examples of which could be fitted with skis. Finally, and most importantly, there is no record of a Captain Olaf Larsen or a Dr Norsel, and the RNoAF archivists believe it was extremely unlikely that any jets would have operated over Spitsbergen as early as 1952. Yet the story persists in certain quarters even today, and the "V-7" angle is often used as further "proof" of the existence of the Nazi flying disc projects. It is therefore important that this story is shown up for what it was, a complete hoax.

I have already recounted Belluzzo's 1950 article in *Il Giornale d'Italia* where he claimed that flying discs had been designed in Germany and Italy as early as 1942. It may be no coincidence that he decided to give the newspaper interview on the anniversary of the founding of Mussolini's Fasci Italiani di Combattimento party in 1919. Belluzzo was a self-confessed fascist, and it has been alleged that his information on flying discs was an attempt to steal some of the limelight that had been bestowed on Germany in regard to secret weapons research during the war. He also gave the interview in Rome to coincide with a large neo-Nazi and fascist rally held in the city.[853] Whatever the Italian's motivation, his piece was soon re-published by numerous newspapers, although many sought to

include their own summary together with selected quotes from Belluzzo. A translated version of the same piece that appeared in the New York *Times-Herald* at the same time included claims by Belluzzo that he had personally drawn up plans for a 10 metre-wide disc, which had *"disappeared along with Benito Mussolini when he fled to northern Italy in 1943"*, so therefore after the armistice.[854] In his original article, Professor Belluzzo did not mention anyone else involved in research or development into flying discs, only that both Hitler and Mussolini were interested in the programme. He died two years later, having provided no further details or more importantly, any evidence with which to substantiate his claims.

General Ferruccio Ranza, former head of the *Aviazione Cobelligerante Italiana* (ACI, or "Italian Co-Belligerent Air Force"), the section of the *Regia Aeronautica Italiana* that supported the Allies after the 1943 armistice, dismissed Belluzzo's claims a few days after the original article was published, although at the time the professor's story appeared to be taken quite seriously by European newspapers and at least one scientific journal. I suspect, although cannot prove, that Georg Klein had read a translated version of the Italian's article at some stage between 1950 and 1953, and due to increasing reports and public interest into the numerous worldwide UFO sightings at the time, decided to offer a statement regarding his own "part in the story" to the newspapers in an attempt to garner some of this attention. Whatever their motivations, they appear to have wormed their way into the myth of the German flying disc projects and continue to feature among numerous on-line "histories" of the devices.

Klein had other sources for his spurious claims. Key to the whole saga of Nazi flying saucers is Rudolf Schriever, who I had first learned about in the pages of *German Jet Genesis.* Most commentators refer to him as a *Flugkapitän* ("Flight Captain") in the *Luftwaffe*, although there was no such title in this organisation's rank structure. *Flugkapitän* did exist as a purely honorary title, but it seems to have only been awarded to civilian test pilots who carried out a series of important or dangerous flights. Two female test pilots,

Hanna Reitsch and Melitta von Stauffenberg, were also awarded this accolade.[855] According to various sources, including Nick Cook's *The Hunt For Zero Point*, Schriever had been a *Luftwaffe* pilot before being transferred to Heinkel's design section in early 1940 due to his *"advanced ideas about aircraft that could take off and land vertically".*[856] Apparently, he was then asked by Ernst Heinkel, head of the company, to develop a working prototype to test these ideas. Whilst even a cursory glance at the diverse nature of designs that the Heinkel company produced during WW2 (although outmatched by the radical plans that came out of shipbuilder-turned-aircraft-manufacturer Blohm und Voss) proves that the company was not averse to following up interesting leads, there does not appear to be any evidence that Schriever was a pilot, a Heinkel designer or a test pilot. W. A. Harbinson is at odds with this narrative as he suggests in *Projekt UFO* that Schriever started thinking about a vertical take-off "flying top" whilst working for Heinkel in 1941.[857] Schriever is also listed in Harbinson's book as an engineer, although it should be noted that *Dipl.-Ing.* (*Diplom-Ingenieur*, or "engineer's degree") was used as a formal title by German aircraft designers during this period.

However, as with most of the available "evidence" relating to Nazi flying discs, Rudolf Schriever's history with the *Luftwaffe* and the Heinkel aircraft company hinges greatly upon regurgitated claims made by a single source which is then parroted as truth. This original source, as it happens, was Schriever himself. His first appearance in the press was only six days after the publication of Belluzzo's own piece regarding flying discs in *Il Giornale d'Italia*. The 30th March 1950 edition of the *Der Spiegel* news magazine featured an article about Schriever titled *Untertassen: Sie fliegen aber doch* ("Saucers: but they do fly"), just three days after a translated copy of Belluzzo's interview had been published in *Neue Press.*[858] It is likely, but not proven, that Schriever had stumbled upon the translation of Belluzzo's article, and this had spurred him on to provide his own submission. The *Der Spiegel* piece read as follows:

"Rudolph Schriever, who says engineers throughout the world experimented in the early 1940s with flying saucers, is willing to build one for the United States in six to nine months. The 40-year-old Prague University graduate said he made blueprints for such a machine, which he calls a flying top, before Germany's collapse and that the blueprints were stolen from his laboratory. He says the machine would be capable of 2,600mph with a radius of 4,000 miles, Schriever is a US Army driver at Bremerhaven."[859]

It appears that after the war, the former engineer and alleged flying disc designer had only been able to secure employment as a supply truck driver, even though, according to the newspaper, he had been a *"chief pilot at the leading German aviation industries."* Huge numbers of prominent aircraft, missile and rocket designers living in what would become the Allied part of a partitioned Germany were offered work in America as part of a secret operation known as *Paperclip.* The Russians were also busy doing the same thing (albeit rather more forcibly at gunpoint) in what would later become East Germany, and there are stories of how they tried to bribe or even kidnap some of the specialists in the Western Zones. It is therefore strange that Schriever eluded this massive search for important designers, documents and material relating to the myriad of German secret weapons in the immediate post-war period, given his experience with a radical aeronautical design. One would have thought a person with such knowledge would have been snapped up by one or both sides of the "Iron Curtain". There was nothing in the *Der Spiegel* article to suggest that he had ever been contacted by anyone either representing a group, company, or country with the offer of a job opportunity. Clearly, then, the *Der Spiegel* article was an attempt to redress this situation to his advantage.

Schriever mentioned that he first had the idea for the *Flugkreisel* ("flying top") in 1942, whilst working as *"the chief pilot in Bohemia."* He did not elaborate on the details of his flying career at that time or confirm that he worked for Heinkel but claimed that his design had attracted the attention of engineers at Prague a year later. This is

obviously at odds with the information in both Nick Cook and W. A. Harbinson's books, but the quote mentioned in *Der Spiegel* no doubt came from Schriever. Of course, the truth of the matter was far from certain, as the supposed designer later contradicted himself on another part of his "history".

The article in *Der Spiegel* included some more technical details on the project. The *Flugkreisel* was to be fitted with three "nozzles" taken from the Me 262 jet fighter (presumably a reference to the type's Junkers 004B jet engines), weighed three tonnes and was 14.4m in diameter. Apparently, Schriever continued to work on his plans until 14th April 1945 when he made the decision to flee with his family to avoid falling into the hands of the Russians. It is inferred, but not clearly stated, that the designer was actually working in Prague up until that date. Ending up at his father-in-law's home in Bremerhaven, Schriever told *Der Spiegel* that he had set up a small workshop there after the war to continue his research. However, he claimed that the property was burgled on 4th August 1948 and his plans were stolen, although the culprit (and the *Flugkreisel* documents) were never found. His workshop could, of course, have been the "laboratory" referenced in the English translations of the Der Spiegel article that found their way into various American provincial newspapers a few days later, including the 2nd April 1950 edition of *The Lima News* in Lima, Ohio.

The *Der Spiegel* piece includes the first mention of Schriever's *Flugkreisel*, but it does not include any of the other flying disc designs which have been credited to him as per Klein's April 1953 piece in *Welt am Sonntag*. Nor did he claim that a disc was successfully test-flown in February 1945. In fact, Schriever's article in *Der Spiegel* did not even suggest that he had even built a flying top or a flying disc at all, only that he had designed such a device. He did however state that *"duplicates of his blueprints were given to colleagues in Prague for safe-keeping"*, and that he presumed they were now in the hands of the Russians. Given that the designer had fled Prague with his family before the Soviets arrived, it seems strange that he had entrusted colleagues remaining behind in the city with his plans as he would have known they were liable to be

captured. Schriever also believed that the spate of UFO sightings in America were simply encounters with man-made saucer-shaped aircraft that were built there *"and perhaps of other nations as well."* If the blueprints for Schriever's "flying top" had ended up in Russia, it is surprising that they did not make any attempt to find him and snatch him for their own post-war research. If one assumes that the Soviets did attempt such an abduction and failed, he never told the press about it.

Three days after the *Der Spiegel* article was published, Schriever's name popped up again in the press, this time however in the unlikely setting of *Heim und Welt*, a German women's weekly magazine. An article, apparently based on a letter he had sent to the publication, included three illustrations depicting his *Flugkreisel* design, one which was supposed to show it in flight.[860] Although the drawings were quite rough, this did not stop the article being translated for use in at least one Italian newspaper over the coming weeks. This provoked a response which will be examined in more detail later on in this chapter.

These early forays by Schriever did not suggest that much, if anything, had come about as a result of his *Flugkreisel* project. From what was mentioned in the *Der Spiegel* article, it appears that he had only produced blueprints and other technical papers, some of which may have ended up being captured by the Russians at the end of the war. If his intent had been to attract the attention of the Americans, he had failed miserably. However, undeterred by this setback, he allegedly filed a patent for a wingless, elliptical-shaped flying machine in 1952. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published a report in November of that year confirming this, although again there was no independent corroboration and the article simply relied on an interview with Schriever.[861] He claimed that the machine was based on work he had begun back in 1941, had a diameter of forty metres and could be powered by either jet or piston engines. Its maximum flight speed had been calculated as three times the speed of sound (3700km/h). This is all the more amazing when one discovers that

Schriever did not seem to have any verifiable technical or scientific background prior to allegedly becoming a Heinkel test pilot.

A year later, he was the subject of a “special report” published in the illustrated weekly news magazine *Deutsche Illustrierte.*[862] It included an article entitled *Fliegende untertassen in Deutschland erfunden* (“Flying Saucer invented in Germany”). It began with a jaunty quote from Schriever himself: *“Had we been able to continue working, they* [flying saucers] *would be as common a sight here as hot buns in a breadbasket.”* Mention of his patent application, supposedly lodged with the relevant office the previous year, did not feature in this new piece.

For someone who was still employed as a driver for the US occupation forces in Germany, Rudolf Schriever was, in complete contrast to his earlier reports, now apparently in great demand for his knowledge of flying discs, at least according to the article published in *Deutsche Illustrierte*. Not only were emissaries from various American research institutes and universities allegedly beating a path to his door, but he claimed he was also being besieged by professors and engineers who were wanting to avail themselves of his services. *“From west and east, delegates are arriving constantly to make him the most enticing offers.”* Of course, the article in *Deutsche Illustrierte* was rather flimsy in terms of actual detail and, as with his first foray into the media, appeared to be little more than another desperate appeal to be given work somewhere in the aviation industry. The magazine carried pictures of his house and family life. In addition to the cut-away drawing of the *Flugkreisel*, there was also a facsimile of a letter he had supposedly sent an acquaintance, mentioning that he had turned down lucrative offers of work from abroad:

“Foreign bids could not entice Rudolf Schriever to give his knowledge to foreign powers. He's had bad experiences. He reconstructs his plans for our readers.”[863]

Although he claimed he was now reluctant to accept work abroad, it was odd that Schriever needed to continue to advertise himself in this way, rather than living a quiet life in Germany. His mention of previous bad experiences apparently related to something that had happened in South America, although he provided no further details. Schriever did however suggest that he had also received offers from the United States and East Germany, noting that the latter would have meant the Soviet Union. Had a number of approaches finally been made, on the strength of the articles in *Der Spiegel* and *Heim und Welt*? We will probably never know for sure one way or the other. However, Schriever never left Germany, so it is unlikely that any offer was accepted.

The article did elaborate on Schriever's *Flugkreisel* design. He likened the "flying top" to a combination of a helicopter and an aeroplane, using *"the idea of making the fuselage a flattened sphere in the centre, with several blades fitted together like a disc, rotating around it."* He stated that primary development work had begun on 15th July 1941, although not where, and also claimed that a scale model of the device was completed on 2nd June 1942. A photo of Schriever and his family at home in Bremerhaven was accompanied by a cross-sectional drawing of the *Flugkreisel*. A raised central cupola, spacious enough to allow the pilot to stand at his controls, sat in the centre of a circular array of what appeared to be large adjustable blades or wings attached to both the cockpit area and a thin fixed outer ring. Although not explained in any depth, its propulsion system appeared to consist of several rocket engines attached to the lower side of the adjustable wing framework by small struts. *"Driven by tiny rockets, it flew a day later, and we were all delighted by its aerial performance."* The actual performance that was achieved during this test flight was, however, not described in any further detail. As for further progress, Schriever himself was clear on the subject:

"However, I was only able to achieve actual construction of a full-scale model in Prague. The diameter of the first flying saucer, if you want to call it that, was 14.4 metres."

Although there was no suggestion this full-scale model had flown, either in February 1945 or at any other stage afterwards, the designer possessed a list of its potential capabilities, reiterating the tremendous speed he had mentioned back in 1950:

"Vertical start and landing, hovering in the air, and a maximum speed of around 4000 kilometres an hour!"

One wonders how Schriever had managed to calculate such performance figures as there was no mention of the full-scale model ever flying. Had they had simply been imagined to spice up the *Deutsche Illustrierte* article? And where in Prague was Schriever's team based? He gives no details in any of the newspaper articles, although other sources claim that this was an out-station of the BMW engine works located just outside the city.[864]

Although Schriever had explained in the 1950 *Der Spiegel* article that his original stash of development data and technical drawings had been "stolen from his laboratory", in *Deutsche Illustrierte* his story regarding the documents changed. He stated that he and his family had been forced to flee Prague before the Russians took the city, and returning to Germany, they were welcomed at a farmer's house near the town of Regen in Bavaria. His design plans were stolen from the farmhouse whilst he stayed there on 14th May 1945. So now instead of being taken during a burglary at his father-in-law's house in Bremerhaven in August 1945, the *Flugkreisel* design work had, according to Schriever, been pinched whilst he was at an isolated farm in south-east Germany three months earlier.[865] It was hard to know which version, if either of them, was true. The more one learned about the designer, the less that appeared to make sense.

According to most accounts, Rudolf Schriever died in 1953, so based on the date of the *Deutsche Illustrierte* article, this must have happened late in the year. Given the mystery surrounding the German flying disc subject, it is not surprising that even his death is

disputed in some quarters, as there were subsequent accounts of witnesses seeing him in Bavaria as late as 1965. Of course, these people do not have names that can be traced to question further, and once again it seems to be a case of allegations that simply cannot be verified one way or another. Whilst Nick Cook repeated the claims regarding Schriever, Miethe and Habermohl building flying discs during WW2, he concluded there was no evidence to confirm what they and others who have repeated the stories since these "revelations" stated was true.[866] Nick confirmed to me his continued reluctance to accept these claims due to the complete lack of supporting information.[867]

It did not take long for Schriever's articles to provoke a response from readers, although an Italian living in Switzerland, one Giovanni Dalla Bona, clearly took matters a stage further after seeing the piece in *Heim und Welt*. Dalla Bona had his own article or letter published in a South Tyrolean newspaper (possibly *Alto Adige*) a few days later, where he claimed that Schriever's disc design was originally his idea. He stated that the Italian government had passed his design to the Germans in 1939, at around the same time that he had successfully flown a small (50cm diameter) model at his Luzern workshop. Dalla Bona's design was described as resembling an "upward cone" with a transparent cockpit placed on top. The section between the top and the base of the machine rotated quickly, and four small wings were also attached to allow the craft to take-off.[868] No further details of this rather odd-sounding vehicle or Giovanni Dalla Bona, its alleged inventor, subsequently appeared. Without any supporting evidence ever coming to light, it is extremely doubtful that this machine ever existed.

If Klein had only used Schriever's articles as the basis of his allegations, then it is difficult to see where he had obtained the information about the alleged test flight of a flying disc in February 1945, as the latter never mentioned this. Of course, the alleged test pilot and Heinkel designer was not the only source that Klein may have had to hand. The elusive Dr. Richard Miethe, who according to Klein had managed to flee Breslau in a Me 163 *Komet* in the last

days of the war, finally surfaced (at least in print) at the end of June 1952. Sadly, there was no mention of his miraculous escape from the clutches of the Russians courtesy of a rocket-powered interceptor. It is a story that I would have loved to have read more about. Rather than being interviewed for a German newspaper, Miethe had been interviewed by a reporter from the French evening broadsheet *France Soir.* Indeed, the main topic of the article that appeared in the newspaper's 27th June 1952 edition dealt with a team of former German rocket scientists that had recently been expelled from Egypt. According to the story, they had refused to give the country's military authorities copies of their completed research documents. The Egyptians had confiscated their plans and personal effects and had also refused to pay the scientists their wages until the documents were delivered.

The team's leaders, Dr. Voss (an armaments expert) and *Herr* Fuellner, owner of a company that employed former wartime rocket scientists and technicians, were listed in the article and independent corroboration of their names and their expulsion from Egypt came courtesy of a piece published in the October 1992 edition of the well-respected *Jane's Intelligence Review*. However, after stating that some members of the team had fled to Tel Aviv in Israel, the original *France Soir* article then went on to list an interview with one Dr. Heinrich Richard Miethe, who had plenty to say on the subject of wartime research into flying discs, and also his particular role in such work. He was described as living in Tel Aviv, a strange bolt-hole for a former German secret weapons engineer. This section of the *France Soir* article gave a little background regarding Miethe, presumably provided by the scientist to the French reporter. He was listed as being forty years old, a former *Oberst* ("Colonel") and scientist in wartime Germany, and an aeronautical engineer. According to the article:

"Dr. Miethe claims to have worked, from April 1943, as the head of a group of technicians of the Tenth Reich Army, in Essen, Stettin and Dortmund, where the principal research for German secret weapons

was carried out. The first V-1s and V-2s were delivered from these factories."[869]

Miethe's background is interesting, but it needs to be examined in detail. Two points, namely his rank of *Oberst* and being in the "Tenth Reich Army" seem strange for an aeronautical engineer and rocket scientist. *Oberst* is a military and not a civilian or scientific rank. A title along the lines of *Dipl.-Ing* or *Dr.-Ing* would have been more appropriate. Odder still is the use of the term "Tenth Reich Army". Allowing for translation errors from German into French and then into English, there is no match for this title among the numerous scientific organisations in the wartime *Reich*. There was a 10. *Armee*, a WW2 field army which was briefly on the German order of battle between August and October 1939, and which was then reactivated in August 1943 as part of the defensive line in Italy.[870] However, neither of these incarnations had any type of aeronautical or scientific unit on their establishments, nor any links with factories or research establishments in Germany or elsewhere. No equivalent scientific or technical group title can be found to match this title, or a version of it. It is therefore quite difficult to ascertain which organisation Dr Miethe supposedly worked for in the war. One hopes that an engineer, requiring accuracy and precision in his work, would know the correct name of the branch of service he was employed in.

Turning to Miethe's claims about flying bombs and rockets, all of the early V-2 development and research was carried out at Peenemünde, on the island of Usedom on the Baltic Sea coastline, the facility being officially known as the *Heereswaffenamt-Prüfwesen* ("Army Ordnance Department, Research and Development Section").[871] Split into two separate parts, one dealt with research into liquid and solid-fuelled rockets, plus control units for guided missiles, and the other was the test centre at Peenemünde where the ballistics, materials, guidance, control system, fabrication and testing laboratories were located together with the wind tunnel. As far as the V-2 was concerned, the test rockets were only ever hand-built and mass production had never been considered at that stage.

A V-2 assembly line was eventually created at Peenemünde, and three more were planned, the first at the Zeppelin works in Friedrichshafen, the second located at the Rax-Werke at Wiener Neustadt in Austria[872] and a third at the Demag plant in Berlin[873]. None of these were finished but the first two plants did manage to build components for the rockets and engine testing appears to have been carried out at Raderach, just north of Friedrichshafen.[874] However, all three would have assembled rockets from parts built in smaller factories located all over the *Reich*. It is difficult to work out where the alleged facilities at Essen, Stettin and Dortmund fitted into the picture.

Miethe's comments about the V-1 flying bomb simply do not stand up to scrutiny either. It was tested at the *Luftwaffe's Erprobungsstelle* ("Testing Site") at Peenemünde-West, known as Karlshagen airfield. Launch ramps for test firing into the Baltic were constructed at the northern end of the site, and experiments into air-launching V-1s from twin-engined Heinkel He 111 bombers were carried out from the airfield.[875] Three companies built components for the flying bomb: Argus in Berlin (pulse-jet engine), Fieseler at Kassel (airframe) and Askania at both Berlin and Űberlingen (guidance system). Given that both the V-1 and V-2 were tested at Peenemünde, and that various flying bomb and rocket production component contracts were fulfilled partly through the use of concentration camp labour at numerous sites connected with the companies concerned, the three cities that Miethe mentioned did not have major connections with either project, much less being their principal sites of research.

Whilst Miethe had provided the names of two Germans involved in the field of rocketry, ones that could be independently verified as working in Egypt in the early 1950s, his own involvement in the project was much less definite. No proof has been found to back up his claim of being in Egypt, or his statements about joining the Arab Legion in Addis Ababa and then Cairo after escaping to North Africa at the end of the war. Indeed, there were still sizeable British military forces in Egypt until 1947 – my late father was among their number. According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, the Egyptian rocket project

was nowhere near as important as the wartime V-2 programme had been. Reporters believed that it was a small, short-range tactical missile fitted with a conventional warhead, and one fitted with a solid-fuelled motor. It was hard to believe that someone that claimed to be previously involved in research into cutting edge research had wound up in such a project, although it could have been the only job offer that Miethe had received in the immediate post-war period. One would also think that someone involved in radical aeronautical design would have been scooped up by the Americans in their post-war trawl of German aerodynamicists and rocket engineers. Miethe's apparent fall from grace, aeronautically speaking, did not seem to stop him making fantastic claims about his wartime activities, ones that equalled and even surpassed those made by Schriever. He also had a view on the current crop of flying saucer sightings around the world, if the *France Soir* report was to be believed:

"The Russians were luckier, getting their hands on the engines, and capturing three of my colleagues. I therefore assert that if flying disks are in the skies, they were built in Germany, as developed under my orders and probably reproduced by Germans in chains in Soviet captivity." [876]

Miethe had seemingly spent the last seven years attempting to re-create his plans for a flying disc that he and his fellow engineers had built during WW2. Presumably this was in his spare time when he was not working on the Egyptian project. Of course, anyone hoping for names that could be checked and cross-referenced were sadly disappointed. All Miethe would say on the matter was that three of them were now dead and the others were being held by the Russians *"beyond the Urals".* He claimed that this machine was what the newspapers persisted in calling "flying saucers".[877]

The alleged aeronautical engineer had no such reluctance when telling the story of the flying disc he claimed had been built. In addition, Miethe had apparently designed the engines for his flying disc, rather than use one of the existing German jet powerplants

such as the Jumo 004B fitted to the Me 262 jet fighter or the slightly more reliable BMW 003 installed in the He 162 *Volksjäger* ("Peoples' Fighter"). However, information on exact what kind of engines he had built was vague. No less than twelve of these Miethe-designed powerplants were supposed to have been laid out inside a *"moving metal ring which turned inside the central mass"* (presumably where the device's cockpit was located). Gases emitted from the jet engines' exhausts were recovered using a rather novel compression unit, supposedly invented by a British engineer back in 1938. Again, there were no further details, nor the name of the inventor of this system. If this was a "closed loop" type of unit, then either a heat exchanger or waste heat recovery unit could have been used to collect exhaust gases and transform them into electrical power. However, these systems had been discovered before 1938: plate heat exchangers were invented in the early 1920s and waste heat recovery units date back as far as the mid-1800s when they were used in the coal industry. If Miethe was referring to something completely different, he was reluctant to say exactly what it was, and what it was intended to do. He muddied the waters somewhat further with his description of the device itself, by claiming the following:

"One of the engines was intended for a supersonic helicopter. The appearance of this apparatus, at a distance of several thousand metres, could, without magnifying glasses, more or less resemble the saucer of a set of tableware."[878]

The German engineer Friedrich von Doblhoff did design and build a helicopter that was powered by small "tip jets" fitted at the ends of the rotor blades, and his first prototype, the WNF 342 V1, flew in 1943. Three further test machines, fitted with "tip jets", were also built and the last one was taken to the United States after the war. [879] A more advanced machine, fitted with ramjets, was apparently designed by Doblhoff, although this may not have been built. In any case, none of these helicopters were capable of supersonic flight. Neither were any of the wartime designs put forward by the two main

German helicopter producers, Flettner and Focke-Achgelis – or any built to this day.

The *France Soir* interview did, however, include more details of this hitherto unknown craft. He described his creation as being "discus-shaped", *"an immense metal disc of circular form, with a diameter of approximately forty-two metres."* He also explained the problems he faced when trying to find a suitable aerodynamic form that would allow his design to break the sound barrier, and if that wasn't enough, the disc also had to *"transport bombs to ranges over a distance of 20000 kilometres, guided by radio and radar, and driven by means of a compressed gas based on helium."*[880] Based on Miethe's outline alone, his disc definitely ticked all the boxes when describing *Wunderwaffen*.

Miethe also provided details about the testing programme associated with his alleged flying disc. Eighteen pilots had apparently died during numerous early test flights of the prototype. He claimed that the first successful flights had taken place over the Baltic, *"exactly three days after the beginning of the offensive by von Rundstedt in the Belgian Ardennes, and with great success."*[881] It is unknown as to where and when the unsuccessful tests took place. His statement does however date the first successful flight as being on 19th December 1944, which was three days after *Wacht am Rhein* (the German codename for the so-called "Battle of the Bulge") began. No information was provided about where the Miethe disc supposedly operated from either, although in the unlikely event that his story was actually true, this would almost certainly have been either at the *Erprobungsstelle* at Tarnewitz, on the Baltic near Wismar, Rechlin, or the one at Peenemünde-West, all of which were still operational at that time. The latter was located at the tip of a peninsula that had been closed off since 1937, due to the secret nature of the weapons testing that was carried out there, and both it and Tarnewitz were involved with work relating to vertical take-off point-defence interceptor projects. Staff at Peenemünde worked on the Bachem Ba 349 *Natter* vertical-launched interceptor whilst those at Tarnewitz helped with Heinkel's P.1077 *Julia* point-defence

interceptor design. Rechlin was still used for the testing of *Luftwaffe* aircraft, but fuel supplies restricted the number of flights. Any of these sites could have been a testing site for a flying disc, although since runways were not required so it could have been anywhere in the *Reich*.

After the failure of *Wacht am Rhein* in early January 1945 and that of *Nordwind*, a smaller and equally unsuccessful offensive in the West, plus the impending collapse of *Armeegruppe Vistula* in Poland, it was only a matter of time before Germany itself was overrun. According to Miethe, in early March 1945, just after the Americans had crossed the Rhine (at Remagen), the impact of enemy forces entering the *Reich* had caused *Generalfeldmarschall* Wilhelm Keitel, the German Army's highest-ranking officer, to speak to Adolf Hitler about the secret flying disc project. The designer went onto claim that Hitler had then ordered the disc, which had by that stage been designated as the "V-7", straight into large-scale production in the underground factories located in the Harz Mountains and in southern Germany. Miethe also stated that Keitel himself had copies of the plans for the so-called "V-7" and claimed that the Allies had tried to find these at the end of the war. He also reiterated that the Russians had captured the engines that were designed for the flying disc, together with three of his former colleagues on the project.

Miethe's claims in the *France Soir* article therefore represent the first occasion on which the designation "V-7" was used. It is clear from both his statements and those of Schriever around the same time, that his design was, if it actually existed, the only one to bear that designation. Therefore, looking at Masters' list of supposed projects in *German Jet Genesis*, this would be the fourth one in the list.[882] 138 feet equates to around 42 metres so is fairly accurate, although the description of the "adjustable wings" seems more in line with Schriever's claimed design. Again, however, Miethe's claims, ones which apparently involved the most senior officials in Nazi Germany at the time, cannot be independently verified and to date

no documents confirming orders to establish production lines for “V-7s” or any other flying discs have ever been found.

That the Nazis operated a huge system of underground factories is not disputed, as both the *Mittelwerk* and *REIMAHG* facilities are well-known and documented in papers and photographs. *Mittelwerk* saw production of Fi 103 flying bombs, A4 (V-2) rockets, EMW *Taifun* unguided surface-to-air missiles and He 162 *Volksjäger* jet fighters.[883] *REIMAHG* was a Me 262 factory which would also have built components for the Dornier Do 335 *Pfeil* (“Arrow”). It is also true that large-scale production contracts for several new weapons systems were planned and issued in the final months of WW2, including the Ruhrstahl X-4 air-to-air missile, Jagdpanzer 38D (a larger version of the *Hetzer* tank destroyer) and Focke-Wulf Ta 183 *Huckebein* (a single-seat, single-engined jet fighter, of which only a few initial components may have been produced before the end of the war). However, these orders were completely unrealistic at a stage when the *Reich* had virtually no remaining resources of manpower or materials, and its enemies were rapidly converging on the plants earmarked for such production. Even if advanced jet- and rocket-propelled technology had been available in terms of numbers of aircraft, the necessary fuels were also in extremely short supply. It is somewhat preposterous to suggest that a radical, technologically advanced project such as a flying disc could have existed among the chaos and shortages of manpower, materials, testing facilities and fuel in Germany during the last six months of the war.

Turning to Dr Miethe’s claims about the performance of the “V-7”, the ability to carry a bombload *“guided by radio and radar”* with a range of 20000km sounds too good to be true. A flying disc with such endurance would have been able to reach New York and return safely to a base in Germany with fuel to spare. The Nazis devoted a lot of time and energy in looking at ways to take the war directly to America, although without much in the way of actual progress. Messerschmitt designed and built the four-engined Me 264, the so-called *Amerikabomber*.[884] However, it and the six-engined Ju 390 were confined to a couple of prototypes each, whilst the ideas of V-2

rockets being fired from floating cannisters towed by U-boats, and the multi-stage A9/A10 two-stage missile combination, remained firmly on the drawing board. A well-known claim, in which a Ju 390 supposedly flew to within 12 miles of New York on a proving flight in the autumn of 1944, has been almost totally discredited due to lack of evidence and also conflicting accounts of the date it alleged occurred.[885]

The "V-7" designation used by Miethe in conjunction with his alleged flying disc is also problematic, primarily because nothing has come to light about the V-4, V-5 and V-6 projects which, logically, would have been in development following the V-3 "super gun" programme that was cancelled in July 1944. "V-4" has been applied to various projects by numerous post-war commentators, with many suggesting the *Rheinbote* surface-to-surface missile as a strong contender. This weapon did in fact exist and around 200 were fired at Antwerp between December 1944 and February 1945.[886] However, it was never officially referred to as the "V-4", and in any case, there was no V-5 or V-6 project that is known or even tentatively referred to. There is another explanation, however, involving the *Versuchs* series of numbers applied to experimental prototypes of potential *Luftwaffe* aircraft. If indeed "V-7" was actually *"Versuchs 7"*, then that would have meant the disc was the seventh prototype of Miethe's design under this system. If one also takes the designer's statements at face value, this may have been possible, especially since eighteen pilots allegedly lost their lives during testing.[887] This surely would have involved crashes and the loss of the machines involved? Taking Miethe's claims together with the complete lack of supporting evidence, however, the existence of just one flying disc, let alone seven or more, seems rather implausible. However, the *France Soir* article would not be the last time that his name cropped up in connection with these exotic machines.

To date, Habermohl's background and subsequent fate has been impossible to verify as well.[888] The first mention of his name is in the 1953 *Welt am Sonntag* interview and all future mentions seem to be based on that piece. His first name has been given as either

Klaus or Otto, and he was allegedly responsible for (or at least involved in) developing the radial flow jet engine in the 1930s, one which would later become synonymous with “adjustable nozzles”, technology that would be used much later to great effect in the British Harrier VTOL aircraft. This claim, like so many others made regarding the subject of German flying discs, cannot be verified, and his involvement in the disc programme remains a mystery, if indeed he actually existed in the first place. Of course, if he was a real person and had wound up in Russian hands, it is entirely possible that he was spirited away to some secret facility deep inside the Soviet Union in order to work on advanced aircraft and may never have been seen again. The Russians played down the role that German scientists and technicians had in their post-war rocketry programme, unlike the situation in America. However, given claims made by the likes of Schriever, Miethe, Belluzzo, Klein, Lusar and Vesco, it is likely that Habermohl was completely fictitious and having him fall into Russian hands was simply a convenient way of preventing anyone from searching for him in post-war Germany.

No-one to date has ever been able to locate any evidence to suggest that Habermohl even existed. However, if the whole story was made up as I suspect, then his name may have been taken from an obscure report buried away in the CIOS files. I discovered a memo from August 1945 from the Chief of Weather Services, requesting that a report written by a POW in England regarding post-war meteorology and “meteorological rockets” should be published. The name of the POW was *Ministerial Direktor* Dr. Habermehl. It is the nearest I have ever come to finding a document with a similar name to the mythical disc designer mentioned.[889]

Although several websites try to tie the 1954 CIA report on Georg Klein into a labyrinthian story dealing with Nazi UFOs, the intelligence agency was only referring to an article reporting the alleged engineer’s claims, and nothing more. Inflating it into “proof” of the existence of German flying discs is something of a stretch. And yet a combination of Klein’s claims and reports of UFOs in newspapers in the early 1950s actually prompted one London

resident to write a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, which was printed in their 29th June 1954 edition. In it, George Marik stated that he had *"seen one of these 'saucers', not an 'eerie light' or a 'strange phenomenon' – but a real thing, made of duralumin and rivets, manned not by 'superbees from Mars' but by ordinary human beings."* Marik explained that he had been assigned to an aircraft manufacturing company in Prague during the last two years of WW2 as an engineering apprentice.

"One day (in the closing stages of the war) when I arrived at work, I saw a strange aircraft, oval shaped and seemingly unpainted, which apparently took off from the neighbouring airfield belonging to the Technical Institute of Aeronautics, then occupied by the German Luftfahrtministerium (Air Department). This particular aircraft accelerated at an incredible speed and gained altitude within a few seconds. Then it slightly banked and turned at what seemed to be almost a right angle."

Marik had apparently asked friends at the Institute about the craft he had seen, but they could or would not provide any details. He claimed that after the war, another person, who had previously been employed there, told him that this "flying saucer" was equipped with a new type of rocket. The friend even drew him a rough sketch of the machine and explained how it operated. Of course, this information was not contained in the letter to the newspaper. Whoever this acquaintance was, he told Marik that he did not know what had happened to the craft once the Russians had taken over. Marik claimed that he had been questioned by American intelligence officers after he fled Czechoslovakia in 1948, but they had not taken much interest in this strange machine. He then mentioned seeing a mention of George Klein's claims in the August 1953 edition of *Aircraft* magazine.

Who was George Marik? Valdik's List of family members who perished in the Holocaust includes a *"George Marik, 41, slave labor, Germany (Survived)".* As far as I am aware, Marik never provided further details of his wartime work for the Germans or information

regarding the sighting and after writing the *Telegraph* letter, he slipped back into anonymity. However, anonymous sources seeing strange flying machines at Prague during the war continued to appear to give their own stories, some many years later.

Author Henry Stevens recounts the story of how he was introduced to “Leo”, who was a child at school in Prague during the war and saw a *“flying disc ascend from the airport”*. It was described as a disc-shaped, jet-powered machine climbing noisily from the airfield. Unfortunately, the alleged witness cannot recall any other details, including the date or even the year.[890] However, Stevens is a questionable source of information with regard to German secret weapons as he is a firm believer in the existence of flying disc projects and also believes that two fictional aerial *flak* mines are responsible for many of the “Foo Fighter” reports from WW2. We will look at the latter in Chapters 13 and 14.

Belluzzo’s comments printed in the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale d’Italia* on 24th March 1950 provoked a response courtesy of the Hamburg weekly publication *Die Strasse*. In its 9th April 1950 edition there was a long article accompanied by what can only be described as a helicopter with “tip jets”. Referencing Belluzzo’s statements in the Italian press, the article (whose author is unknown) went onto list the names of two German engineers who had apparently worked with the designer. One was called Kurt Schnittke and the other was only known by his surname, Rentel. The former may have been a pre-war glider designer from East Prussia.[891] The latter was allegedly captured by the Soviets at the end of the war. However, given the anonymity of the article’s author, it remains unclear as to whether there was another potential disc designer out there. There is always the possibility that whoever Schnittke was, he simply wrote the piece himself and had tried to insert himself into the flying disc legend. At the time, there seemed to be a clamouring for such material in European newspapers, and it would have been seen by some as a potential source of income, especially if some juicy pieces of information were provided to a journalist. The common thread running through all of the personalities involved in this story is that

none of them could provide a scrap of proof to back up their claims. However, this lack of evidence did not stop them making such outlandish statements.

A *Die Strasse* journalist tracked down Schnittke for his side of the story. He duly confirmed his own involvement in Belluzzo's project but stressed that German assistance had been essential, even fundamental to the Italian's success. He then went onto describe the nature of the machine they had designed, and in so doing brought together the two separate strands in the whole Nazi flying disc mythology, namely the Schriever-Miethe-Belluzzo discs and Vesco's secret weapons, the latter allegedly being the source of the "Foo Fighter" sightings. Schnittke stated that they worked on the development of a rotary-winged aircraft, one whose role was to fly into the middle of an enemy bomber formation and then explode. He had begun design work in 1943 but it was unclear whether Belluzzo had started beforehand. According to Schnittke, the Italian machine consisted of a spherical centre section, which contained the radio-guidance equipment, fuel tanks and landing gear. Two wings, each one 26 metres long, projected from this centre section, with rocket engines (apparently the same as those installed in the Me 163 *Komet*) fitted on their tips. The device was allegedly capable of reaching 10000m in sixty seconds, and during the hours of darkness it would look like a luminous disc by virtue of the rocket exhausts rotating around a central core.

According to his statement in *Die Strasse*, Schnittke (and by extension, Belluzzo) were not working on a true flying disc. Instead, judging by the description, they were building an unmanned rocket-powered helicopter, which only looked like a disc at night. It was also an expendable weapon since it was designed to explode in the middle of a bomber formation. Whilst a helicopter was clearly not a flying disc, the nature of the mission matched exactly the claims made by Vesco regarding two secret weapons, these projects presumably being so ground-breaking that there was no confirmation of their existence either before or after his book was published. A closer look at the Belluzzo/Schnittke/Rental device's alleged

propulsion system is however warranted before descending the rabbit hole which is Vesco's book *Intercept*.

Schnittke claimed that the machine was powered by the same rocket engines fitted to the Me 163 *Komet*. According to his description of the design, each 26 metre-long wing (effectively a rotor blade if the accompanying image was at all accurate) had one of these powerplants attached to its tip. If this was true, then each wingtip was carrying a load of around 165kg, the weight of a single Walter HWK 109-509 rocket motor. A "wing" structure such as that described by Schnittke would not have been able to support even a small engine without breaking or bending to the point where the tip jets would have touched the ground.

Look at any history of the "Nazi UFOs" and Viktor Schauberger's name usually pops up somewhere. Born in 1885 into an Austrian foresting family, as a child he lived in the Holzschlag area.[892] He was called up for service in WW1. Following in his father's footsteps, shortly after the end of the war, Schauberger was offered the chance to manage a forest that was owned by Prince Adolf-Schaumberg-Lippe, located near Steyerling. [893] According to the legend that has built up around him, the young forester came up with his own theories about the nature of water and how a natural stream or river could build up energy that travelled in a different direction to its flow. In 1922, Schauberger started designing and building his own type of water flume for logging companies, allowing larger amounts of logs to float downstream, or so the story went.[894] By 1928 his designs were also being apparently used elsewhere in Austria, plus in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. In 1931 or so, Schauberger started to experiment with ways of extracting energy from flowing water. It is also suggested that he travelled to Berlin in 1934 to talk to Adolf Hitler after a local business acquaintance set up the meeting. Again, according to the legend, Hitler was enthused with Schauberger's talk of logging flumes, but the meeting went awry when the Director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute somehow gate-crashed the meeting and berated the forester for "*filling the Führer's head with nonsense*".[895] Schauberger allegedly received an invite to attend a further meeting

the following day, but he was reportedly so disillusioned with the official's intervention that he was already en route back to Austria. Despite the warm reception afforded to him by Hitler, he apparently refused to work for the *Reich*. This begs the question as to why he travelled to Berlin in the first place. Did he simply refuse in a fit of pique after being berated by the Institute director? Or did he just want to meet Adolf Hitler?

Viktor Schauberger heard nothing more after this meeting until 1938, when the *Gauleiter* ("Regional Leader") of Franconia, Julius Streicher, apparently offered him a grant of ten million Reichsmarks and immediate access to Professor Kotschau's laboratory at Nürnberg. Together with his son Walter, an engineering student at Dresden University, the Schaubergers started work trying to unravel the secrets of "living water".[896] However, there is no mention of this on the Schauberger family's website that lists Viktor's history.[897] During the course of their studies into the colloidal flow of water, the two men allegedly discovered something else: a new form of power plant. Viktor Schauberger then allegedly obtained an electric starter motor from an aircraft and fitted it to a small scaled-down prototype of a machine he had constructed, one which he believed would somehow harness this energy they had stumbled across.

The concept of Schauberger's machine was apparently quite simple. A battery started the motor, the power from which spun a series of turbine blades installed inside a barrel-shaped drum. This scaled-down model drum was about five feet in diameter and weighed around 300lbs. Also inside this drum was a hollow cone, which widened out at its lowest point and was open to the undersides. The cone served to create a spiral of "living water" around it and within the drum, driven by the spinning of the turbine blades. This spiral, faster than running water, created a "micro-tornado" of water which exited the drum through a much smaller water turbine and impeller that was installed at the pointed (top) end of the cone. There was also the opportunity to feed power from the smaller top turbine to the larger lower one, thus creating a power-efficient, closed system – or as some put it, "free energy". The small

model engine was apparently test-flown and shot through the roof of the laboratory to be recovered from some distance away, again if the legend is to be believed. Of course, this same legend is told in different ways, depending on what you read and who you listen to. Other versions of the same story have the model running on air spun around inside the drum, not “living water”.[898] This was presumably the *Repulsine*, although the family history website suggests the machine was built in Vienna, not at the lab in Nürnberg.[899]

There was a witness to Schauberger’s experiments. Aloys Kokaly had apparently started to build parts for the *Repulsine* during 1940. These were allegedly delivered to the Kertl Werke at Wien. Kokaly reported that the model was successfully tested before his arrival, and that it had sheared six large retaining bolts before it broke through the roof, “trailing a glow of ionisation” in its wake.[900] Calculations were made to work out the power and lifting capacity generated by the scale model. At 20,000 rpm, the 20cm wide model was said to be capable of lifting 228 tonnes.[901] If true, this would have provided an amazing technical breakthrough. Why did the Germans not exploit this wonderful technology and potentially win the war?

Despite this alleged breakthrough, which promised Germany a potential source of untapped power which could be possibly harnessed for all sorts of applications, Schauberger’s research was not recognised by any of the *Reich’s* technical agencies. In 1941, an incident referred to by his family as an “intrigue” resulted in his admittance to a mental hospital at Mauer-Őhling, where he was put under continuous observation by SS medical staff.[902] This has led some critics of the Nazi UFO myth to claim that the engineer was actually insane, and completely incapable of designing or constructing a radically advanced propulsion device. However, according to the Schauberger family website, Viktor was also corresponding with the Messerschmitt aircraft company on the subject of engine cooling devices and had written to Heinkel about engines as well.[903]

Again, according to the legend that has been built up around him, Schauberger was allegedly called up for military service in a draft in 1943, when he was aged 58, and ordered to report to his first posting, a *Fallschirmjäger* ("paratrooper") company stationed in northern Italy.[904] This sounds almost ridiculous. In 1943, the manpower situation in Germany was starting to bite but drafts of late-middle aged men were not taking place to fill vacant positions in the front line, and certainly not older men with no recent military experience. To suggest that Schauberger was assigned to a paratroop unit was also absurd. Whilst their airborne assault days were all but finished by that stage of the war, the *Luftwaffe*'s *Fallschirmjäger* units were still considered to be something of an elite in 1943. This was at least a year before they were decimated the following summer, forcing unit commanders to fill gaps with former *Hitler Jugend* teenagers and men once considered too old or too sick for combat. It is not clear what role Schauberger allegedly had whilst serving in Italy, but apparently he was soon on his way back to Austria, courtesy of an order issued by *SS-Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, commanding officer of the SS, no less.[905] This is again omitted from the family's website, so it is unclear whether it actually happened. The author Henry Stevens stated that Schauberger was drafted into the *Waffen-SS* in 1943 and does not mention Italy. The SS did establish its own paratrooper unit, but not until October 1943 at least. *SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon* 500 comprised men from penal units, mixed with a cadre of SS volunteers. It would have been extremely unlikely that a 58 year-old man would have been selected for this unit, which had parachute jump training and carried out an abortive glider-borne assault on Tito's headquarters in Yugoslavia in May 1944.[906] If Schauberger was drafted into the Waffen-SS, it was not into *SS-Fj.Btl.*500.

According to the legend, Schauberger was recalled to the SS technical institute at Wien-Rosenhügel. However, he did not stay there very long. Instead of being allowed to carry on his research, he was somehow sent to the infamous Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, where he was contacted by *SS-Standartenführer* Zeireis,

who offered him a choice. Another version of the same story suggests he was taken to Schloss Schoenbrunn, located near the camp itself.[907] Schauberger was given the option of picking some of the Czech prisoners to help him build piloted versions of his *Repulsine* back at the SS institute, or he could be shot there and then. Naturally, Schauberger chose to live and took his newly-recruited concentration camp inmates back to Wien-Rosenhügel. However, work at the institute was soon interrupted when the facility was all but destroyed in an Allied bombing raid. He and his team were forced to move to new premises at Leonstein, near Linz in Austria. This is where the prototype of a full-sized, piloted version of his *Repulsine* was supposed to have been constructed sometime in late 1944 or early 1945.[908]

Franz Zeireis certainly existed; he was the commandant of Mauthausen and had been so since February 1939 when still a *SS-Sturmbannführer*. The camp was the site of the infamous “Staircase of Death”, where prisoners had to carry baskets full of stone or push heavily laden wagons up a set of 186 stone steps leading from the quarry floor to the flat summit of the hill above. Czechs were certainly inmates there, with a mixture of political prisoners and Jewish inmates living together in cramped huts.[909] However, Schauberger’s presence there cannot be confirmed, nor can the assignment of several Czech prisoners to his research work. The practice of sending inmates to work in sub-camps or in local industry was certainly very common at this time, and many of the prisoners had technical and engineering skills which were put to use by the Germans.

Rob Arndt, a long-time proponent of the Nazi flying disc myth, gave 1944 as a rough idea of when Schauberger and his team relocated to Leonstein, about 25km south of Linz and 120km west of their Rosenhügel facility.[910] One version of the Schauberger legend gives 19th February 1945 as the date on which the full-scale piloted prototype made its first test flight, but it was carried out near Prague.[911] This suggests some confusion with the other disc-shaped craft that were claimed to have flown. Another telling of the same story

suggests only a radio-controlled version of the *Repulsine* flew before it was captured by the Americans.[912]

However, another account suggests that Schauberger and his team only moved to Leonstein in May 1945, and a successful test of the manned *Repulsine* was conducted just before an American intelligence unit turned up and seized it, apparently being well-informed about the nature of the device.[913] This seems rather implausible too. Even shifting locations on 1st May 1945 meant the team would have had a week at the most to move, set up again, test and fly the *Repulsine* before Allied troops turned up. Conditions in the rapidly-shrinking *Reich* were chaotic in the final weeks of the war. Moving a team of engineers and technicians, plus half-finished or completed prototypes for radically advanced technology, required transport which was in short supply due to the war situation. For an intelligence or T-Force team to be sent to find Schauberger and his machine would have meant his name would have been on a list of targets assigned by the US Combined Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee (CIOS, its British counterpart being named BIOS). I have looked through the Category “One” list of targets for aircraft, rockets, missiles, guns and other aviation equipment that were assigned for capture and examination in 1945, but Schauberger’s machine does not feature in the list, nor its subsequent amendments. One wonders how details of his research even reached the Allies so they could act upon it so quickly. The legend suggests that the Americans interrogated him at length and then detained him for a period of at least six months in order to prevent the Russians or renegade Nazis from seizing him and whatever knowledge was in his head.[914]

An interesting footnote to the Schauberger story is that in 1957, he and his son were allegedly approached by two Americans who insisted that they both travel with them to the USA. They agreed but did not make the journey until the following year, when they arrived at a military base near Red River in Texas. Schauberger and his son re-started their research work at this unknown facility and were kept incommunicado from the outside world. In September 1958, the contracts they had signed (and it is unclear who with, but the US

Government is obviously the prime candidate here) expired and were extended by the Americans. However, the Austrian no longer wished to work in Texas and refused to carry on his research. Both men returned to Linz on the 20th of that month, and Viktor Schauberger died five days later, aged 73. According to his son, on his deathbed, the designer repeated *"They took everything from me, everything. I don't even own myself."*[915] Schauberger had allegedly signed away his knowledge of the *Repulsine* and its technology as a condition for being allowed to leave the United States.[916] The family website states it was an American consortium who invited Schauberger, in order to work on experiments with "implosion energy".[917] His invention has so far proved impossible to replicate.[918]

Schauberger's story and invention sounds too good to be true. There are several different versions of his wartime history, and some of them have completely implausible situations. Apart from the suggestion that he was insane, and the inability for post-war scientists and engineers to replicate what was, on the face of it, a fairly simple device to construct, the fact that this technology was not featured in lists of captured German material or exploited in some way after the war is rather telling. Unless, of course, one subscribes to the theory that it was spirited away somewhere after the war and only available to a shadowy elite. The noted aviation and defence journalist and author Nick Cook summed up Schauberger in his 2002 book *The Hunt For Zero Point*:

"You didn't need a degree in physics , though, to appreciate that whatever they had or hadn't been, foo-fighters would have had to come from the minds of engineers – not from a man who'd spent his life amongst Alpine forests and streams."[919]

The name of a further alleged flying disc engineer appeared in the mid-1990s when Josef Andreas Epp published a book called *Die Realitaet der Flugscheiben* ("The Reality of the Flying Discs"). Apparently it did not sell well, and he died three years after it was

released, aged 83 and penniless. The book was posthumously republished in 2002. Epp did not simply claim that he worked on one flying disc design. He stated that he had worked on both the Schriever/Habermohl disc and the Miethe/Belluzzo project. Epp suggested that fifteen examples had been built in total, which was way in excess of anything that the other alleged participants had claimed.[920] In his book, he also claimed that a successful test flight of one of the discs took place in February 1945. Epp also apparently took two photographs of the device whilst it was in flight. One of these, together with a retouched blow-up of the "disc", which is a classic "saucer-shaped" black blob, is published in Henry Stevens' *Hitler's Flying Saucers*. It was allegedly taken at Prag-Gbell, which would tie in with Schriever's claims.

However, Epp has given three separate dates for his photographs, and therefore presumably the test flight. He appeared in the "documentary" *UFO Secrets of the Third Reich*, a VHS copy of which I owned in the 1990s and claimed on tape that they dated from the autumn of 1944. In his book, Epp states the official first flight occurred on 14th February 1945, which was the same month claimed by Georg Klein in the 1950s. Henry Stevens entered into correspondence with Epp in the 1990s and was informed that the flight had really happened in August 1944, but that the "official" test occurred in February 1945.[921] The alleged disc engineer also provided figures for the disc's test flights and performance. He stated that it was able to reach Mach 1, and on the following evening, it broke the sound barrier, but the pilot was "frightened" by vibrations in the airframe. Epp also claimed that he came up with the design that was used by Schriever and Habermohl in their project.[922] He also suggested that these designers came up with their own separate designs, which, if true, meant there were three discs being planned or constructed at Prag-Gbell in 1944.

Epp's claims did not stop at simply working on discs at Prague. He claimed that he gave *Major-General* Walter Dornberger, Director and Co-ordinator of the *Heeresversuchsanstalt Peenemünde* (the Army's rocket research centre) a model of his disc design.

Dornberger allegedly tested Epp's model and was so impressed by it that he personally recommended it, although this was based on comments that the former officer supposedly made to the designer after the war.[923] Josef Epp supplied Henry Stevens with a letter which was supposedly written in March 1944 when he was at Prague, and lists the words *"flying disc research"*, quoting speeds of 550 mph (880km/h). The letter cannot, of course, be verified as being from that time. Epp's trump card is, however, written testimony from July 1965 in the shape of a letter from a former German test pilot known as Otto Lange. I will reproduce his (translated) letter to Epp in full below.

"Unfortunately late, but not too late! After 21 years, I have once more found the flying disc inventor, Epp.
As an engineer-pilot who in wartime built flying discs V.I, V.II and V.III, I would like to document before the whole world that Mr. Joseph Andreas Epp was the originator of the idea and designs of the flying discs! The designer Epp developed this idea to prototype for 25 years in spite of hinderance and difficulties. To me, as chief pilot, who flight-tested the first flying discs of Epp's idea, and have flown for over 500 kilometres, it is incomprehensible that the realisation of Epp's flying disc designs have been ignored. Well known scientists and technicians have confirmed to me in writing the correctness of designer Epp's flying discs designs.

Among these, Dr. W. R. Dornberger, Schriever as co-designer, certified engineer Langendorf, SNECMA, France, certified engineer Flaman Bertin, France, engineer Alex Consinet, Paris, certified engineer Rolf Engel, Rome, Italy and so forth.

From now I will take Epp's cause and make it my own and wish that all those who are interested be permitted a realisation.

Munich, 10th July 1965, Flight Chief Headquarters Engineer, Retired

Otto Lange"

However, a considerable amount of doubt has been cast on this particular document by German researchers who have compared “Otto Lange’s” hand-writing with Epp’s. It appears that the designer may have written the letter himself.[924] An “engineer-pilot” by the name of Otto Lange has not been traced, although this is a common German name. Perhaps that is why Epp chose it, if he indeed fabricated the whole claim of working on not one, but two wartime flying disc projects.

Another name that crops up from time to time in connection with the Nazi UFO myth is Georg Sautier. Various newspaper and magazine articles written by someone using this name appeared during the 1950s. It appears that it was an alias used by Georg Klein. In 1952, a Hamburg resident by the name of Georg Sautier, together with one Guenther Lukas, patented the “Rak-52”, a toy metal rocket powered by a firework. The toy resembled a V-2 in layout. However, due to the solid-fuel propellant used, the item was banned from production and a spring-drive launching mechanism substituted instead.[925] V-2s to kids’ playthings – a strange comedown for an engineer, if indeed this was actually Georg Klein.

The story of Nazi UFOs took another strange turn in April 1957 when an Austrian individual, by then resident in the United States, presented himself at the Miami Office of the FBI and provided information about a “saucer shaped” flying device he had seen during WW2. This was the first of three visits that the unnamed gentleman made to the same FBI office, although the second involved his offer to return to Austria, in order to work for the Americans as an intelligence agent. The third visit was much more disturbing, as it was *“an incoherent story of recently meeting an individual who asked him to kill his mother”.* The following information taken from the first meeting on 26th April 1957 was forwarded to the FBI Director on 8th June 1967 – yes, just over ten years later:

“On April 26, 1957, [redacted], Miami, Florida, appeared at the Miami Office and furnished the following information relating to an object,

presently referred to as an unidentified flying object, he allegedly photographed during November 1944:

Sometime during 1943, he graduated from the German Air Academy and was assigned as a member of the Luftwaffe on the Russian Front. Near the end of 1944, he was released from this duty and was assigned as a test pilot to a top secret project in the Black Forest of Austria [this would have been Carinthia, not the better-known Schwarzwald in south-western Germany]. During this period, he observed the aircraft described above. It was saucer shaped, about twenty-one feet in diameter, radio-controlled, and mounted several jet engines around the exterior portion of the craft. He further described the exterior portion as revolving around the dome in the center which remained stationary. It was [redacted's] responsibility to photograph the object while in flight. He asserted he was able to retain a negative of a photograph he made at 7,000 meters (20,000 feet). A Xerox copy of the negative, as furnished by [redacted], appears on the last page of this communication. Also, a still photograph he allegedly made 'at the risk of my life', illustrating the object parked in a hanger, appears on the last page.

According to [redacted], the above aircraft was designed and engineered by (First Name Unknown) [redacted], a German engineer whose present whereabouts is unknown to him. He assumed [redacted] was taken into custody by Allied Forces upon the termination of hostilities. [Redacted] stated [redacted] unsuccessfully attempted to avoid the German draft, but was apprehended by the Gestapo in Vienna, Austria, sometime during late 1943 or early 1944. [Redacted] also assumed the secrets pertaining to this aircraft were captured by Allied Forces. He said this type of aircraft was responsible for the downing of at least one American [Martin] B-26 [Marauder] airplane. He furnished the following fuel and engine data:

'Fuel mixture of N_2H_4O in Methyl Alcohol (CH_3OH) rather than 'oxygen-holding' mixture of hydrogen peroxide H_2O_2 in water. 7m 1,3m high two rocket motors; smooth flow, rotary drive over 2,000 meters per second…'

[Redacted] said he copied this data from a board located in the hanger area.

[Redacted] asserted he was shot down by the British on March 14, 1945, after having been assigned to the Western Front. He was held prisoner by the British in London and later in Brussels until his release in 1946. He departed for the United States from Bremerhaven, Germany, on December 26, 1951; entering the United States in New Jersey on January 7th, 1952 and was subsequently naturalized in Miami during 1958. He is presently employed as a mechanic at Eastern Airlines, Miami, Florida. He related he was born May 3, 1924, in Austria.

[Redacted] stated he has withheld this information because he assumed the United States possessed it. He has become increasingly concerned because of the unconfirmed reports concerning a similar object and denials the United States has such an aircraft. He feels such a weapon would be beneficial in Vietnam and would prevent the further loss of American lives which was his paramount purpose in contacting the FBI.

[Redacted] reiterated he has the original negatives of both photographs. He said the shots were taken at a thirty second time exposure."[926]

A saucer-shaped device with jet engines mounted around its edges was reminiscent of the descriptions of the Schriever and Habermohl "designs", although the one portrayed by the unnamed Austrian seemed to be radio-controlled, at least according to the witness. Henry Stevens, a proponent of the Nazi UFO myth, contacted the FBI in 2001 requesting clearer copies of the two images mentioned in the witness's statement. He was told that the Miami Office may have had better images, but they had since been destroyed.[927] It appears that the FBI took no further action in 1957.

There were even earlier attempts by people to suggest they had worked on flying disc-type machines in Germany during WW2, although they still date after Roswell in July 1947 so knowledge of

the newspaper headline that went around the world may have influenced their subsequent actions. In August of that year, Guida Bernardy sent a letter to General Lucius D. Clay, the Military Governor for Allied-occupied Germany. When translated, the letter stated that Adolf Hitler was still alive and directing efforts to construct craft capable of travelling long distances and carrying atomic bombs. The letter writer also claimed that the flying saucers witnessed over America and Europe at that time were examples of the Nazi craft. In the letter, Bernardy claimed that he had been attached to "2nd A.d.N." and had knowledge of a Professor Maurer who was working on atomic power, supposedly in connection with propellant for rockets. Maurer, together with another scientist called Kleistow, were responsible for developing the discs and these were being flown over Europe. The writer even suggested the "fireballs" ("ghost rockets") that had been witnessed over Scandinavia in 1946 were these craft, although ones constructed from inferior materials that had burned up in the atmosphere! In addition, the discs were launched by means of an "envelope rocket", controlled by Hitler who was living in a special submarine located in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean![928]

A second German, Heiss-Adalbert Huis, requested access to the flying disc discovered near Roswell, as he had read about it in the press, stating that he had worked on similar types of machine during the war. There was, however, keen competition in the shape of a Dr. T. Kelterborn, a dentist, who got in touch with the military authorities in Frankfurt on 11th July 1947, just days after the announcement that a disc had been found at Roswell, claiming that he alone was the inventor of the flying saucers being reported in the German newspapers. According to Kelterborn, he gave his invention to a "German inventors' office" located in Berlin in 1944. He claimed that he had not received a reply from them, but that the military authorities must have developed his design further. The dentist also believed that the plans were captured by the Russians at the end of WW2, and presumably had built their own version which was being operated over America. Kelterborn stated that *"as the inventor, I*

alone am in the position, under circumstances, to reveal my invention." The US military authorities in Frankfurt, unsurprisingly, did not show any interest in the good doctor's kind offer, and he did not follow up his initial approach with another letter.

Whilst there is no record of any follow-up action being taken, it is likely that these were Germans hoping for passage to and entry into America, in an attempt to emulate the hundreds of scientists who had already made the trip. As we have already seen, men like Rudolf Schriever would also try these tactics in the early 1950s but used the German press instead.

One more hoax can be laid to rest. Photos of the *Fliegende Schildkröte* ("Flying Turtle") flying disc have appeared on the Internet in recent years, purporting to be a secret design. However, WW2 references to *Schildkröte* refer to a nickname applied to the He 162 *Volksjäger* jet fighter, one which was quickly dropped.[929] The name was not used elsewhere.

Whilst this appears to be an over-long and rather convoluted examination of the Nazi UFO claims, it essentially boils down to a series of statements made by a small number of individuals, none of whom have actual evidence to back up their stories or in many cases appear even to be aware of each other's work. If true, there were numerous flying disc projects underway in Germany during the war, all apparently carried out in isolation. These claims were subsequently repeated elsewhere and then embellished by others, all those wishing to claim their own place within the overarching German flying disc myth, or possibly even pushing neo-Nazi narratives. However, one name is still left unexamined. This person made claims about a completely different strand of exotic Germany weaponry that was alleged to be the source of both the wartime "Foo Fighter" reports and the immediate post-war UFO sightings. His name was Renato Vesco, and we will take a close look at him and the weapons he claimed existed. However, before that, we need to examine the only circular-winged aircraft that was actually built in Germany during WW2.

Chapter 11:

Germany's Only Disc-Shaped Aircraft, The Sack AS-6

Die Bierdeckel ("the Beermat")

- Luftwaffe pilots' nickname for the Sack AS-6, 1944.

Now that we have dispensed with the fake German flying discs, it is time to describe an actual disc-shaped aircraft that existed during WW2. However, please do not think I have suddenly taken leave of my senses and will spout forth about some hitherto secret weapon that no-one has ever heard of, complete with an elaborate back-story of how it was spirited away to a secret hiding place before the Russians could capture it. This particular machine is well documented regarding details and photos. In addition, it was even flown – although whether a slight hop can be classed as a "flight" is open to interpretation. If you look at enough websites that deal with Nazi flying saucers, sooner or later you will discover the Sack AS-6. The same sites often lump this machine in with "Foo Fighters", so it is important to explain how irrelevant it was in terms of being a likely cause of the reports.

Arthur Sack was a farmer with a passion for aviation, or more specifically, the prospects of building his own circular-winged aircraft. Living in the Leipzig region, in July 1938 he entered the *Nationalen Wettbewerbs für Flugmodelle* ("National Competition for Model Aircraft") held at Leipzig-Mockau aerodrome. The contest involved flying a circuit of the airfield and landing back at the starting point. Most of the entries submitted failed to even get off the ground. Sack's machine was called the AS-1. It was comprised of a circular wing, some four feet in diameter, and was fitted with a single tail fin and a horizontal stabiliser (tailplane) to control pitch. Fitted with a small 30cc petrol engine, it was never going to race around the

course, but Sack's machine did actually fly successfully, and even demonstrated short take-off and landing runs.

Arthur Sack would have probably returned to obscurity if not for the fact that among the various *Luftwaffe* officers watching the contest was Ernst Udet, *Generalluftzeugmeister* ("Chief of Armaments Procurement") for the RLM. Udet, a well-respected if dissatisfied member of the *Luftwaffe* High Command, was already interested in aircraft that displayed short take-off and landing characteristics after he flew the Fieseler Fi 156 *Storch* ("Stork") in 1935. This liaison machine could take-off in 213 feet (65m) and land in just 61 feet (20m). It could almost hover in a 25 mph (40km/h) headwind. The AS-1 therefore piqued Udet's interest, who wondered if the farmer's design could be turned into a full-scale machine capable of similar flight operations to the Fi 156.

Udet unofficially encouraged Sack to develop his initial design further, and the farmer built four more circular-winged models. The last of these was the AS-5, which boasted a 4 feet (1.25m) wingspan and weighed just less than 10lb (4.5kg). Without official backing, though, he was getting nowhere, and in any case his secret supporter Udet had committed suicide in November 1941. However, Sack was undaunted and by the beginning of 1944 he had managed to establish contacts at Mitteldeutsche Motorenwerke ("MiMo"), one of the Messerschmitt aircraft company's subcontractors which was based at the nearby Brandis airfield. A MiMo engineer agreed to design a full-scale, manned prototype fitted with a circular wing, and calculated the structural loads. Both men also persuaded other employees at the firm to fabricate parts for the new aircraft. Given the pressures put on German industry at this stage of the war, especially in aviation, it is surprising that Sack was even able to have this design realised. Whether the subcontractor knew that their staff were being employed to create a prototype of dubious value is unknown, but construction work did finally go ahead during the early months of 1944.

As it was a relatively simple wooden design, Sack's AS-6 *Versuchs 1* (first prototype) quickly took shape at Brandis. Plywood was used in both the construction of its wing ribs and coverings,

ending up with a “wing” some 21 feet (6.4m) in diameter, and a forward integral “fuselage” section that housed a single Argus As 10C-3 240hp engine. Sack had been forced to be creative when it came to sourcing parts for his creation. The engine was taken from a Messerschmitt Bf 108 *Taifun* four-seater liaison aircraft, whilst the cockpit, pilot’s seat and mainwheels were salvaged from the wreck of a Bf 109B fighter, one of the earliest models of this famous *Luftwaffe* fighter.[930] A wooden tail fin was fitted to the aircraft, but initial ground-taxying tests in February 1944 found that its rudder was too small and therefore ineffective. As the rudder didn’t work properly, the AS-6 prototype ran off the taxiway, causing some structural damage to the airframe, including to the starboard landing gear leg which snapped in two. After repairs were carried out, the undercarriage was moved further aft, leading to the inclusion of ballast to stop the aircraft tipping forward. Brakes taken from a wrecked Ju 88 bomber were also fitted.

16th April 1944 saw the prototype Sack AS-6 V1 being ground run along the 2,300 feet (700m) main runway at Brandis. Rolf Baltabol, a test pilot with the ATG company, another subcontractor based at the airfield, was at the controls. With no wind to assist take-off, the machine rolled for at least 500m without even leaving the ground. A brief hop then ensued but that was the highlight of the day’s testing. A further test was conducted, and the aircraft became airborne earlier, but immediately banked to the left due to torque from the propeller, a known problem in machines featuring short wingspans. After these two abortive tests, Baltabol reportedly lost all interest in continuing as Sack’s test pilot. His final recommendation was that Sack had his designs properly tested in a wind tunnel so that any flaws could be identified before testing resumed. Baltabol also suggested that the machine should be fitted with a much more powerful Daimler-Benz engine as installed in the latest version of the Bf 109 fighter.

It is not known whether Sack attempted to arrange wind tunnel testing for the AS-6. The saga of the prototype may well have ended there and then but for the arrival of the rocket-powered

Messerschmitt Me 163 *Komets* from I./JG 400, together with their pilots, in the summer of 1944. Arthur Sack was clearly someone who could talk his way around problems as he soon persuaded *Hauptmann* Robert Olejnik, the unit's commanding officer, to let him "borrow" one of his pilots for testing purposes. Somehow, Olejnik agreed, and *Oberleutnant* Franz Roszle was assigned to fly what the fighter pilots were soon calling *die Bierdeckel* ("the beermat"), although presumably out of Sack's earshot. Another name bestowed upon the aircraft at the time was *Bussard* ("Buzzard"). It arose from the pilots saying that the AS-6 spent most of its time on the ground, and it was built from scavenged spare parts! Roszle carried out a single test flight which again featured a short hop, the attempt ending with one of the machine's main undercarriage legs being damaged. There is also a suggestion that a previous test flight had ended with the aircraft tipping forward and the propeller shattering, but this has not been verified. Roszle quickly echoed what Baltabol had told Sack: a model of the AS-6 design needed to be tested in a wind tunnel and a much more powerful engine fitted to the real thing. He even suggested that the whole design would be better off turned over to the Messerschmitt company for development, as they had the resources to improve the aircraft.

Sack, clearly a proud and independent designer, refused to hand over his creation to Messerschmitt or anyone else, and returned to his drawing board. He returned to his pre-war obscurity and was not heard of again. Despite his refusal to engage with aircraft companies, Messerschmitt staff did get wind of the design and must have noticed some merit in Sack's design at least. Their designers soon came up with a revised arrangement featuring a larger diameter wing and a fuselage fitted with one of the latest DB 605 engines, delivering around 2,000hp. It would have also had a redesigned cockpit, undercarriage and tail unit, and the plans also made provision for the installation of no less than six Rheinmetall-Borsig MK108 30mm cannon as armament. Needless to say no actual construction work was ever carried out on this new design, apparently designated Me 600.

The AS-6 V1 was pushed onto a remote corner of the airfield at Brandis and effectively abandoned. During the winter of 1944/45, it was damaged during a strafing attack on the base by USAAF fighter-bombers. Some accounts suggest the wreckage was broken up for firewood but whatever its fate, there was no trace of the airframe when American troops finally reached Brandis at the end of April 1945.[931] There are also reports of a small yellow "disc-shaped" aircraft being found at an airfield near Munich in the autumn of 1944, but no further details have ever emerged about this craft or who constructed it. Details of the AS-6 itself only emerged in 1973 when former members of I./JG 400 based at Brandis released photos of the prototype that they had taken there.[932]

Whilst nowhere near the scale of the designs purported to have been built by other disc-shaped vehicle designers, the history of the AS-6 serves as a reminder that not all radical aerodynamical projects were officially sanctioned and supported by German officials, and like the Hortens, had to make do with scavenged parts and operate without assistance from the *Reich*'s resources. Sack's experience showed just how difficult it was for someone with a radical approach to aerodynamics to achieve any progress in Nazi Germany. It is extremely unlikely that any individual or group of aircraft designers could have come up with a radically advanced machine such as a flying disc without access to wind tunnels, proper construction facilities and manpower, not to mention workshops, testing areas and test pilots. All of these were in extremely short supply and tightly controlled in the final years of the war – and despite the chaos, documented. Not so much as a requisition for materials, workers or facilities exists that can be held up as proof of any German wartime flying disc programme.

Despite this, Renato Vesco sought to convince his readership that the Germans overcame all of the above difficulties and managed to construct and fly examples of not one, but two hitherto unknown secret weapons that possessed exceptional performance and astounding technology. Neither of these devices had been recorded

beforehand, and no evidence has ever come to light since to confirm their existence.

Chapter 12:
Renato Vesco, Italian Man Of Mystery

A student of aeronautical problems, particularly in the field of jet propulsion

- Claim relating to Renato Vesco's aeronautical expertise, 1968.

Renato Vesco wrote his book *Intercettateli senza sparare, La vera storia dei dischi volanti*, in 1968, and an English translation appeared in 1971 titled *Intercept, But Don't Shoot: The True Story of the Flying Saucers*. It was reissued in 1994, as *Man Made UFOs: World War II's Secret Legacy*, with chapters written by David Hatcher Childress. I do not know how much input Vesco had in this. He died in 1999, aged 75, and gave few interviews about *Intercept* after it was published. The book is held up by some as a seminal work, particularly in regard to the "Foo Fighters", although it is a vague and unsubstantiated account of two hitherto unknown German secret weapons, padded with verifiable details about conventional wartime projects and flying saucer sightings in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The latter do not appear to be linked to man-made UFOs, beyond official suggestions that witnesses had mistaken them for aircraft or balloons, plus speculative press reports suggesting they were secret air force projects. Whilst Vesco included copious footnotes, they covered more conventional aspects of his text. Sources for his more sensational claims were thin or non-existent. Having re-read *Intercept* in advance of writing *UFOs Before Roswell*, and going through the updated version, I see no reason to alter my initial feelings on first reading it in the mid-1990s.

Intercept provides a biography of Renato Vesco, which also throws up a number of red flags. It states that the author was born in 1924 and was the commander of the Italian Air Force's technical section in 1944.[933] After the armistice in September 1943, the

Regia Aeronautica Italiana split into two factions, the southern part becoming the *Aviazione Cobelligerante Italiana* (ACI, or "Italian Co-Belligerent Air Force"), that fought with the Allies in the Balkans. The northern part that was still under fascist control became the *Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana* (ANR, or "National Republican Air Force"). The ACI had four *Gruppos* ("groups") of aircraft whilst the ANR fielded only two fighter *Gruppos* for daylight defence against Allied bombers, each one comprising three squadrons, so neither was a large concern. Vesco lived in northern Italy so he would have joined the ANR. However, to suggest that a twenty-year-old could be put in charge of an air force's technical section is fanciful. My own hardback copy of *Intercept* also states the following:

"Mr. Vesco has been a senior member of the Italian Association of Aerotechnics since 1943, and is a student of aeronautical problems, particularly in the field of jet propulsion."

Again, Vesco's age seems to call this statement into question. How could an eighteen or nineteen year old be considered a "senior member" of any technical organisation? His name would be recognised in Italy, or at least among members of the technical side of aviation. And yet Vesco's name only ever seems to be come up in connection with the "Foo Fighters".

It is worth leaving the book to one side for a brief moment in order to consider Vesco's 1969 article published in the American men's magazine *Argosy*. This piece included biographical detail, information that had been omitted from *Intercettateli senza sparare*. The *Argosy* piece centred on Vesco's claims about Canadian-built "flying saucers" capable of 1,500 mph, different craft from the Avrocar project that is well documented and known to both aviation enthusiasts and UFO researchers alike. The *Argosy* piece, based on an interview with Vesco, claimed that the Italian had studied at the "German Institute for Aerial Development" prior to WW2 and worked with the Germans at the secret Fiat installation at Lake Garda during the war. To spice up his resume even further, it was suggested that Vesco had worked for the Italian Ministry of Defence as an

undercover technical agent during the 1960s, investigating the UFO phenomenon. Again, we have one of the personalities connected with the secret projects "story" claiming to have numerous and varied job titles, work experience and technical qualifications, none of which can be verified.

Intercept does not mention Vesco's studies with the so-called "German Institute for Aerial Development". As he claimed this was before WW2, he would only have been sixteen or seventeen, as Italy entered the war in 1940. There was no organisation with this title, so the nearest candidate would have been the *Luftfahrtforschungsanstalt* (LFA, or "Aeronautical Research Institute") which was examined in Chapter 10. It is rather fanciful to suggest that a teenage Italian would have been accepted by the LFA unless he was exceptionally gifted and also accredited by his peers. Since neither appears to be true, and Vesco's name is not among a list of the world's noted aerodynamicists, his claim would seem to be false. The *Argosy* piece highlights further concerns relating to the author's credibility. *Intercettateli senza sparare* and *Intercept* do not mention any of his studies prior to WW2. According to the Italian UFO researchers Maurizio Verga and Edoardo Russo, Vesco completed his manuscript of *Intercept* in 1956 but delayed publication for many years due to his job taking him abroad.[934]

Still, surely an author, writing about a controversial subject only a decade after it supposedly happened, would wish to show his competence in discussing such matters in an introduction to his book? Those who have not read *Intercept* may be therefore surprised to learn that Vesco provides nothing of the sort, and he gives almost no details about the work that was undertaken at the secret Fiat facility he allegedly worked at. There is only a page of information relating to the Riva del Garda facility, and it shares space with details of nearby tunnels used for conventional aircraft component assembly lines.[935] The underground facility was certainly used for the latter, but in keeping with the rest of the Nazi UFO mythology, it was a perfect candidate for made-up activities, ones which cannot be verified.

Was Vesco even "*a student of aeronautical problems, particularly in the field of jet propulsion"*, as per the dust jacket of his book? According to Maurizio Verga, Vesco did not receive a qualification for any discipline at all, despite claims of graduating as an aeronautical technician. He did, however, harbour dreams of being an aircraft designer and must have had some knowledge of aeronautics as a fifty page report was submitted to the *Luftwaffe* regarding his design for a "stratospheric fast-jet fighter". It was allegedly based on plans Vesco had drawn up between 1942 and 1944. Unfortunately, he never received a response from the Germans, let alone an invite to officially continue researching his proposition. In the meantime, however, he had decided to become more active in the war. Vesco may have had pro-German or pro-Fascist sentiments, as he joined the *Milizia Volontaria Sicurezza Nazionale* ("Voluntary Militia for National Security", otherwise known as the "Blackshirts") before the Armistice was signed in September 1943. Following the Armistice, he applied to join the ANR and was accepted into their ranks. Believing he was about to be accepted onto a pilot training course, the young Vesco was instead posted as a clerk in a Milan office. However, he appears to have eventually been given rather basic flight training, although it is uncertain whether he flew any combat missions. After the final surrender in May 1945, he served in the post-war *Aeronautica Militare* until 1947, but only as a private. Vesco's story about working abroad in the 1950s may be true, as he apparently found work as an engine technician onboard several merchant ships that sailed across to the United States and into the Baltic Sea.[936] His claims about his time at the secret Fiat facility in northern Italy and being an undercover agent for the post-war government cannot be verified, and yet he is hailed by some as being a scientist who worked on secret projects at Riva del Garda.

That there was a facility along the western shore of Lake Garda is not in dispute. In November 1944, Allied intelligence services were informed that Fiat had been ordered by the Germans to move its aero-engine production facility into caves near Desenzano in May of that year.[937] Further prisoner of war testimony confirmed the

existence of engine production facilities in road tunnels on the steep hillsides running alongside the lake, but as far as is known, the plant was never used for any other purpose:

"Underground factories west shore of Lake Garda: the coastal road from Desenzano to Riva and the road from Brescia to Salo have been closed since January 1945 and are closely guarded by German military police and the Italian Brigada Nera."[938]

There were over fifty different German missile projects during WW2, of which only a dozen or so ever were built and maybe half of these saw combat use. It does not therefore come as a great surprise that Vesco, in his two chapters relating to "Foo Fighters" and secret weapons such as the Bachem *Natter* rocket-powered point-defence interceptor, slips two more secret projects into his narrative, *Feuerball* and *Kugelblitz*.[939] The problem is that they had not been described by anyone else prior to the publication of Vesco's book in 1968, and have not been independently verified since. No official records have ever surfaced that confirm their existence or use. The author claimed that *Feuerball* was responsible for the lights that Allied bomber and night-fighter crews had been witnessing throughout the skies of Europe in the winter of 1944. However, his description of these weapons suggested that they were revolutionary devices fitted with technology way in advance of projects that reflected the level of German research at that time. Vesco hinted at even greater achievements.

When I first read *Intercept* in the mid-1990s, whilst I was fascinated by Vesco's alleged projects, his descriptions simply didn't seem to ring true. If as suggested, he had finished the book in 1956, the war had been over for a decade and details of these *Wunderwaffen* would have emerged via other sources. Information on most, if not all of the "mainstream" German projects had been available for some time by that stage, even if it only amounted to a designation and a brief idea of what the object's role was. I was well aware of most of the special weapons that had been designed, built

and tested by the Germans, together with numerous ideas that did not proceed beyond the drawing board. Yet Vesco wanted his readership to believe that not just one, but two highly-advanced concepts had been built and tested. He also claimed that at least one had carried out a “successful first mission”.[940] Were any of his statements about these projects true?

The following chapters might seem as though they focus on an obscure Italian author who made some grandiose claims about the “Foo Fighters”. However, a discussion of his book *Intercept* provides a perfect opportunity to examine the German secret weapons on the drawing board, testing or in operational service during WW2, ones that could possibly be regarded as explanations for the strange lights and weird objects witnessed by Allied aircrew. Looking at their technology and resulting projects shows just how far away the Germans were from creating a “Foo Fighter” of their own.

Chapter 13:
Feuerball

[It] automatically followed enemy aircraft, attracted by their exhaust flames, and approached close enough without collision to wreck their radar gear…

- A device allegedly responsible for the “Foo Fighter” reports.

In *Intercettateli senza sparare*, Vesco included a section heading entitled *the Anti-Radar Feuerball* in his chapter *Mysterious Night Lights over the Rhineland*. Just short of two pages are devoted to a rambling description of *Feuerball* (“Fireball”), plus its construction and employment, although even these turn out to be somewhat vague. According to the Italian, in the autumn of 1944 (the book lists “1954”, which is a misprint) the OBF, a *Luftwaffe* experimental facility located at Oberammergau in Bavaria, had completed a series of research projects into how electrical apparatus could interfere with the smooth running of an engine up to thirty metres away. It was therefore obvious that if an engine’s ignition system could be affected, then the aircraft it was fitted to would surely crash. Although a practical application was still some way off, given the limited range of the test apparatus, according to Vesco, work continued until the end of the war without meaningful results. However, he claimed that another (unnamed) research centre had adopted the general idea and, by employing something called “proximity radio interference”, could interrupt the more delicate and therefore vulnerable electronic systems fitted to Allied night-fighters. Apparently, this centre was run by Albert Speer and the SS Technical General Staff.[941]

Vesco did not explain what the initials OBF stood for, although it is the modern code for Oberammergau Airport. A Messerschmitt jet aircraft research and development centre officially known as the *Oberbayerische Forschungsanstalt* (OFA, or “Upper Bavarian Research Institute”), code-named *Cerusit*, existed there from 1944,

operating from a former barracks plus an extensive system of tunnels dug by concentration camp inmates.[942] By February 1945, the complex was controlled by *SS-Obergruppenführer Dr.-Ing.* Hans Kammler, the head of missile research and technology.[943] He ordered Messerschmitt to cancel development into other jet aircraft and missiles in favour of ramping up production of the Me 262. It is possible that something along the lines of "proximity radio interference" could have been researched at the OFA for a new missile project, but Kammler's edict meant that this research would have ended or assigned a very low priority.

The "SS Technical General Staff" terminology is also worth examining. Among the myriad of SS units operating during WW2, this would have been under the control of the *SS-Führungshauptamt* ("SS Leadership Main Office"). They had four separate *Amtsgruppen* ("departmental groups"), each one assigned to look after various aspects of the SS. *Amtsgruppe A* dealt with organisation, personnel, and supply, and buried away towards the bottom of a long list of subdivisions was *Amt IX (Technische Ausrüstung und Maschinen*). This was the Department for Technical and Mechanical Development.[944] Kammler's bid for control over all rocket and missile development, including the V-1 flying bomb and numerous projects still undergoing testing, meant that he would have been aware of all of *Amt IX's* projects, including any "proximity radio interference" research and something called *Feuerball*. It is therefore extremely surprising that Vesco includes no mention of him when describing the device. Kammler is only listed in a later sub-section entitled *"SS Dominance"*, in connection with taking over the V-weapons, including the *"famous V-2 torpedo rocket"*.[945]

Vesco included what appeared to be a detailed description of *Feuerball*, a small flying device built to take advantage of the research into "proximity radio interference". According to the author, it was a *"highly original flying machine"*, resembling a tortoise shell, and was powered by a special turbojet engine. Pilotless and unarmed, Vesco claimed that it generated a bright ring of flames when airborne, which gave rise to its name, *Feuerball.* He stated that

it was radio-controlled from take-off, then *"automatically followed enemy aircraft, attracted by their exhaust flames, and approached close enough without collision to wreck their radar gear."*[946] *Feuerball* has been described by some commentators as an "aerial *flak* mine".

An explanation of just how sensitive radar equipment would be affected through close proximity with a *Feuerball* machine was also explained. Not only did the "fiery halo" around the device's circumference (caused apparently by a rich fuel mixture powering the "special turbojet") interrupt radar equipment, but it was also affected by over-ionising the atmosphere in the vicinity of the target aircraft by means of chemical additives, presumably in the fuel which were then transferred to the exhaust. According to Vesco, this ionisation, usually centred on an aircraft's tail plane surfaces and wing tips, would subject a bomber's H2S radar system to powerful electrostatic fields and electromagnetic impulses. The impulses would be created by large Klystron radio tubes inside the *Feuerball* itself, protected by special "anti-shock and anti-heat armour". He also stated that the fiery balls, noticed by Allied aircrew to be harmless, would therefore not be fired upon lest they be caught up in some gigantic mid-air explosion.[947]

The description of *Feuerball* and its mission profile seems at first glance to give lots of detail, but looking more closely, it raises more questions than answers. No information is provided on the "special turbojet" that powered the device, and if indeed it actually existed, it must have been very compact to fit inside the "tortoise shell". Also, emitting a fiery halo is one thing, but the turbojet had to draw air inside itself in order for the combustion process to work, so where was the intake? It would have been impractical to draw in air from the exhaust ring, as the "fiery halo" may not have contained enough oxygen for the process to work properly.

In order to examine Vesco's claims about Klystron tubes being installed inside the Feuerball device, a look at the overall development of radar during WW2 is required. It had been known since at least 1939 that radar would need to work on much shorter

wavelengths than those in use at the time, in order for detection sets to be fitted inside front-line aircraft. The RAF's extensive Chain Home network of early-warning radar sites that proved invaluable during the Battle of Britain operated on a wavelength of 12 metres and required huge aerials mounted on pylons. In late 1939, a pair of British scientists set about trying to improve the magnetron, which at the time was only something of a laboratory curiosity. They had been part of another team looking at developing the Klystron tube, a special valve that could oscillate on wavelengths of around 10cm. [948] They had realised that it would never produce anywhere near the kind of power needed for centimetric wavelengths and thus true airborne intercept radar. The pair came up with what was called the cavity magnetron, which gave Britain a huge advantage in the radar war during WW2.

Although a very technical subject, one of the best explanations of the cavity magnetron I have found is included in Brian Johnson's book of the BBC TV series *The Secret War*. Two British scientists, John Randall, and Harry Boot had been interviewed for one of the programmes in the series:

"Randall began to sketch his ideas: what emerged was a solid copper cylindrical block, with six resonator cavities machined into it, surrounding a cathode." "The basic dimensions for the resonators were based on the work of Heinrich Hertz, who had first demonstrated the existence of radio waves with loops of wire in the 1880s; ironically these first steps into radio were made on wavelengths around 10cm."

Boot had worked out his calculations regarding the size, etc., on the back of a proverbial envelope. These loops were extrapolated onto the cylinder which would form the heart of what would be called the cavity magnetron:
"The copper cylinder was to be put in a strong magnetic field and a high voltage applied between the cylinder and the cathode, so that the stream of electrons coming off the central cathode, instead of

being attracted straight across to the anode (the cylinder), would rapidly rotate past the machined slots and, if this happened at the right speed, it would cause the slots to act as resonators and tuned circuits, oscillating in step together."[949]

The cavity magnetron generated higher powered pulses in the 10cm wavelength range. This meant that airborne intercept radar now became a practical proposition, using smaller and lighter equipment which could be fitted into specialised night-fighter aircraft without compromising their performance. Shorter wavelength pulses allowed the installation of smaller radar arrays, which in turn could pick up smaller targets. Work on producing a suitable radio receiver to go with the new transmitter proved harder, as it was difficult to create a switching system to allow a single antenna to act as both transmitter and receiver. Eventually, a special unpowered type of Klystron tube, called a reflex Klystron, was developed. It created a temporary amount of ionised gas that prevented the outbound signal from flowing to the output and blocking the return signal.

When the centimetric beam was tilted downwards, a rotating aerial allowed ground features such as cities and large buildings to be resolved on a display screen. Development of these findings eventually resulted in the H2S navigation radar being fitted to Halifax and Lancaster bombers, along with Stirlings from the Pathfinder force, the rotating aerials being fitted into ventral fairings. The first raid over enemy territory by aircraft carrying the new radar did not take place until January 1943 as officials were concerned about the cavity magnetron falling into German hands.

At the same time, Germany was developing its own air defence radar system, operating on wavelengths of 53cm or more. The *Luftwaffe* night-fighter force was controlled from a network of ground stations using *Würzburg*, *Würzburg-Riese* and *Freya* radars. *Freya* had steerable aerial arrays but operating on 1.2m wavelengths, they were still fairly large, and no altitude display was given. The *Würzburg* and *Würzburg-Riese* systems operated on 53cm wavelengths and featured large rotating dish aerials, although they

were still smaller than the Freya arrays so were harder for RAF photo-reconnaissance aircraft to pick out. The *Luftwaffe* created the *Kammhuber* Line, a network of air defence radar sites running across the northern coast of Western Europe. Arranged in a series of "boxes", each "box consisted of a Freya for early warning of bomber raids and two *Würzburg-Riesen* to isolate individual enemy aircraft. [950]

Twin-engined Messerschmitt Bf 110s and Junkers Ju 88s would be directed to the vicinity of targets picked up by the *Kammhuber* Line. These aircraft were night-fighter variants of existing *Luftwaffe* types that were used in day escort and medium bomber roles. Guided to the general vicinity of their targets by the ground controllers, radar operators onboard the aircraft then used their short-ranged FuG 202 *Lichtenstein B/C* sets to "talk" their pilots to within visual range of the bombers.[951] However, whilst the sets were small enough to fit in the cockpits of these night-fighters, the radar itself operated on a wavelength of 61cm. This meant that a large antenna array, nicknamed *Matratze* ("Mattress") by *Luftwaffe* crews, had to be fitted to the nose of the night-fighter, which slowed its speed somewhat. More improvements and changes in the frequency used by the radar sets (in an attempt to circumvent Allied jamming) resulted in the FuG 218 *Liechtenstein C-1* and FuG 220 *Lichtenstein SN-2* sets, the latter requiring a much larger antenna array known as the *Hirschgeweih* ("Stag's Antlers"), which reduced the Ju88G's speed by around 80km/h.[952]

Not content with their own valve technology, and unaware of the British cavity magnetron, the Germans tried in vain to improve the Klystron tube so that it could be used to provide effective centimetric radar. However, these tubes were large items in both terms of dimensions and weight. They needed higher power levels to operate successfully and also required greater heat dissipation. As the British had discovered much earlier on, the Klystron was incapable of generating the transmitting power needed for effective airborne radar systems. Whilst German research teams were not able to duplicate the British success with centimetric radar themselves, they did

however benefit from a windfall on 3rd February 1943 when No.7 Sqdn Stirling Mk.I R9264/MG-L was shot down and crashed at Hendrik-Ido-Ambach, near Rotterdam in Holland.[953] The H2S equipment onboard the aircraft was salvaged by the Germans and the cavity magnetron, together with a second salvaged example, were studied closely by German specialists. The potential of the cavity magnetron was quickly recognised, especially as the Germans were by then well aware of the Klystron tube's limitations. Work on their own version began in earnest, although they were hampered by a shortage of materials and parts. RAF bombers that crashed in Occupied Europe were scavenged for spares where possible to assist the project. Despite the urgency, the first centimetric radar set produced by the Germans, FuG 240 *Berlin*, which used a copy of the cavity magnetron found in the July 1943 crash and operated on a wavelength of 9.1cm, was not installed in *Luftwaffe* night-fighters until January 1945.[954] Combat operations with the new equipment was delayed and only commenced in April, just weeks before the end of the war. Only 25 to 30 FuG 240 *Berlin* sets were actually built before the end of hostilities.[955]

As both sides had tried but failed to develop the Klystron tube to the point where it could be used effectively in airborne applications, it seems strange that Vesco states without question that they were part of the *Feuerball's* onboard kit, as surely they could not have generated enough power for useful applications, let alone something that would disrupt engine performance. The answer may however come courtesy of a further statement he made regarding the device:

"Since a metal arc carrying an oscillating current of the proper frequency – equal that is, to the frequency used by the radar station – can cancel the blips (return signal from the target), the Feuerball was almost undetectable by the most powerful American radar of the time despite its night-time visibility."[956]

"Cancelling the blips" presumably refers to "spot jamming", where transmitting at full power on a single frequency overwhelms the

original radar reflection (or “blip”) on the enemy operator’s display screen. Blanket jamming had already taken place as early as 24th July 1943, when Window was used by the RAF during the famous “firestorm” raid on Hamburg.[957] Essentially bundles of metal foil, each strip was cut to precisely half the wavelength of the known German 53cm Würzburg air defence radar. Thrown out of an aircraft, the strips acted as a resonating dipole aerial and returned a strong radar “echo” on the *Luftwaffe* operators’ sets. This story is well known; however, few realise that the Germans were already aware of the principle and had their own version of Window, called *Düppel* (“Chaff”). However, they were somewhat reluctant to use it, lest the Allies copied it and returned the favour.[958] In the end, they waited too long to use it in anger. It is possible that *Düppel* could have been employed by *Feuerball* although it was something of a “brute force” device and had already been countered by the Germans themselves, using a system known as *Wurzlaus* (“Root Louse”). This system could detect Doppler shift, tiny differences in the frequency of the pulses returned from the bombers, which flew much faster than the virtually stationary Window.[959] If Germany had developed such a counter-measure, it was reasoned that the Allies would have similar ones in hand.

Germany did produce other specialised jamming equipment as the war went on, although none of them proved successful enough to obtain the desired results. *Kettenhund* (“Chain Dog”) was designed to disrupt the Eureka ground-based navigation beacon that was used to drop supplies to Resistance groups and later for the accurate landing of airborne forces.[960] *Roderich* was an H2S jammer which was developed by Siemens, although the five watt Klystron tube that powered it limited the device to a very short range. *Roland* was a development fitted with a Klystron rated at ten times the power, but tests still proved unsuccessful, and the project was cancelled in March 1945.[961] It surely must have dawned on the Germans at some stage that Klystron tubes would never be able to generate enough power to jam Allied radars effectively but given the

amount of effort that was expended on projects fitted with them, perhaps not.

According to Vesco, *Feuerball* was capable of jamming or spoofing Allied radar sets and generating electrostatic fields that could affect engine ignition systems. These two capabilities would have placed the device at the forefront of German secret weapon research and given the *Luftwaffe* a serious advantage in the air war over central Europe. The RAF's Airborne Interception Mk.VII set, prototypes of which were fitted into Bristol Beaufighters from the end of 1941, operated on a 10cm wavelength. The improved Mk.VIII used 9.1cm and was installed into Beaufighters and the new de Havilland Mosquito NF.XII purpose-built night-fighter variant.[962] In July 1944, the first USAAF Northrop P-61 Black Widow night-fighters flew missions in Europe, fitted with SCR-720 AI radar sets also operating on the 10cm wavelength. If *Feuerball* did indeed carry some sort of jamming equipment, it would have had to be capable of blocking both the 9.1cm and 10cm wavelengths in order to hide successfully from Allied night-fighters. This would probably have had to involve some sort of switching gear. If the Klystrons were supposed to generate the kind of electrostatic field that Vesco claimed would envelope a nearby bomber from tailplane to wingtip, then a significant amount of power would have been required. As the German radar scientists had already discovered, Klystron tubes on their own only generated low levels of power. Vesco's claims that they were a key part of *Feuerball's* equipment did not seem to make any sense.

Another method that an alleged *Feuerball* could have theoretically employed to hide from Allied radar involves something known as *Schornsteinfeger* ("Chimney Sweep"), although given its actual application during the war, it appears unlikely to have done so. Already mentioned in Chapter 3 in relation to the Horten H.IX, *Schornsteinfeger* was an early form of radar-absorbing material, a rubber "sandwich" loaded with carbon granules. It was designed for maritime use, specifically with U-boats and for the parts that would be above the surface of the waves when they were surfaced.[963]

These small targets in the huge expanses of ocean were easily detected by RAF Coastal Command long-range Halifax, Liberator and Sunderland aircraft fitted with anti-submarine radar, and from 1944, the new 3cm ASV Mk.VI sets which defeated all previous German attempts at counter-measures. *Schornsteinfeger* was designed to reduce the radar returns from a surfaced U-boat, and in early tests it showed promise, lowering the "visibility" of the submarine by about forty per cent. However, when it came to operational conditions, the sea quickly removed most of the covering and salt water quickly reduced the effectiveness of the signal-reducing properties for the remaining material. Although anywhere between 100 and 150 U-boats were fitted with it, as a maritime anti-radar system, *Schornsteinfeger* proved impractical.[964] Could this have been fitted to a missile or other device along the lines of an "aerial *flak* mine"? Covering the outer surface of *Feuerball* with a thick rubber and carbon composite (but presumably leaving the central "ring" of exhausts free of material) would have also increased the weapon's weight, and the heat from the exhausts may have even melted or ignited the rubber itself. It therefore seems unlikely that Vesco had *Schornsteinfeger* in mind when he was writing his book, and it is debatable whether he even knew about it.

Vesco went on to state that the *Feuerball* project was originally conceived at an aeronautical institute in Wiener Neustadt, Austria, and assisted by the *Flugfunk Forschungsanstalt Oberpfaffenhofen* (FFO, or "Oberpfaffenhofen Aeronautical Radio Research Institute").[965] This latter facility actually existed and was founded back in June 1937 to investigate positioning, communication and navigation using electromagnetic waves. Whilst information is available on the people who founded the Institute and its post-war activities, very little appears to be known about what research was actually carried out at Oberpfaffenhofen during WW2, but the only occasion that the FFO was linked with *Feuerball* is in Vesco's book *Intercept*. This same link then features in several pseudo-histories on the topic of German flying discs, including Henry Stevens' *Hitler's Flying Saucers: A Guide to German Flying Discs of the Second World War*, the latest

edition of which was published in 2013. However, Stevens' book simply repeats and recycles what Vesco wrote on the subject, together with a letter from a German physicist claiming to having seen small circular flying machines constructed at a Messerschmitt facility in Wiener Neustadt. The physicist also confirmed Georg Klein's involvement *"with these things".* However, as far as I am aware, Klein only ever claimed to have knowledge of the alleged flying disc projects and did not have anything connection with *Feuerball*, which if it ever existed, was a completely separate programme. Of course, no documentation or oral evidence to corroborate this connection has seen the light of day. The research institute in Wiener Neustadt is not named by either Vesco or Stevens, but if *Feuerball* was conceived there, it would have been at the *Luftfahrtforschungsanstalt Wien* (LFW, or "Vienna Aviation Research Institute").[966] Vesco appears to have been fond of suggesting esoteric weapons designs were carried out at Wiener Neustadt, as this was not the only project he would connect the location with. LFW definitely undertook research into high-speed flight, as Dr Alexander Lippisch, designer of the Me 163 *Komet*, worked there on his P.11 flying wing *Schnellbomber* ("fast bomber"), and work on an unpowered prototype was apparently started but not completed before the end of the war.

The Italian's comments about *Feuerball* automatically following enemy aircraft, *"attracted by their exhaust flames"*, needs careful consideration too. This suggests that the device was fitted with some sort of infra-red detection gear, as would be fitted to so-called "heat-seeking" missiles that saw service from the mid-1950s onwards. Vesco may not have simply plucked this technology out of mid-air, however, as the basic principles had been discovered back in 1904. The invention of the photomultiplier, a type of vacuum tube able to turn photons into an electrical signal, had occurred in 1930.[967] These tubes, extremely sensitive to light in the ultraviolet, visible, and near-infra-red spectrums, finally enabled more serious development work to begin on relevant applications. One of these was the detection of aircraft, and research began in both Britain and

Germany, but neither country's pre-war efforts found much support or funding. Radar was considered a better candidate and received more help, although German scientists found their work being assigned a much lower priority in the face of continued victories early in WW2. The state was not prepared to spend much money on research into an air defence network when European countries were falling like dominoes to the might of the Nazi war machine.

Scientists were still allowed to continue research into practical infra-red detection apparatus, although facilities, manpower and materials were assigned a very low priority by Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, by 1940, a team from the University of Berlin, assisted by the AEG company, came up with *Spanner Anlage* ("Spanner Attachment"), which was installed in two Messerschmitt Bf 110D-3 night-fighters belonging to 1.NJG 1.[968] *Spanner Anlage* consisted of a photomultiplier fitted in the cockpit, together with a large searchlight limited to infra-red wavelengths. The latter would then illuminate the target so that it was visible to the pilot, however the effective range was no more than could be achieved in the visible spectrum, rendering the system useless. Development of *Spanner Anlage* continued with a low priority throughout the war, but no real progress was made by the team and all of the installed systems had been removed by 1942.

Similar systems developed by Carl Zeiss AG were more successfully installed in Pz.Kpfw. V Panther tanks much later in the war. The first FG 1250 *Sperber* ("Sparrowhawk") systems were apparently installed in a mere handful of Panthers as early as September 1944, although it seems that none saw combat until at least January 1945. A 300mm diameter infra-red searchlight connected to a *Bildwandler* ("image converter") receiver and vision scope, looking a lot like a very large telephoto lens, were fitted onto a turret cupola mounting. This was normally slaved to the turret's facing direction, a mechanical indicator tracking the angle of the Panther's 75mm main gun barrel. In practice, though, as the apparatus was fixed outside the turret, only the tank commander

could see through the infra-red scope and therefore had to relay instructions to his crew.[969]

The effective range of *Sperber* with the onboard searchlight was around 300m; there was a plan to double this, although it involved the employment of a second vehicle, an Sd Kfz 151/20 *Uhu* ("Owl") half-track fitted with a 600mm diameter infra-red searchlight. Smaller searchlights were also apparently fitted to the standard Sd Kfz 151/1 infantry transport half-track, fitted to the vehicle's forward machine-gun mounting. These vehicles were assigned the nickname *Falke* ("Falcon"). Information regarding the combat deployment of *Sperber*-equipped Panthers is vague and contradictory in places, however the consensus seems to suggest that several examples were employed in Hungary during the spring of 1945, possibly as many as ten tanks. [970] The equipment was sensitive to vibration from shock to the chassis, caused by rough ground or hits by small-calibre bullets, whilst exhaust baffles had to be fitted to other tanks in the units to prevent light pollution from friendly forces obscuring the view through the scope. A late development saw the driver and gunner also receiving vision scopes mounted next to their viewing slits, although it is not recorded whether Panthers fitted with this equipment were ever delivered to front-line units. Reports that tanks fitted with infra-red gear fought in the "Battle of the Bulge" are probably false, as the Germans for some reason appeared reluctant to field this specialised equipment on the Western Front.[971]

A man-portable version of the FG 1250, the ZG 1229 *Vampir* ("Vampire"), was developed for infantry use and consisted of a searchlight and image converter that could be attached to a *Sturmgewehr* StG 44 assault rifle. A large backpack frame carried the batteries that powered both pieces of equipment. The battery for the searchlight lasted for only fifteen minutes' worth of use, although ranges in excess of 200m were possible through the scope attached to the assault rifle. A flash hider had to be fitted to the gun's muzzle to stop soldiers being blinded every time they fired their weapons. Another version was fitted to sniper rifles and some Russian post-action reports refer to encounters with German snipers at night who

used weapons fitted with large searchlight-type devices which did not light up the battlefield.[972]

The *Spanner Anlage*, *Sperber* and *Vampir* devices were, however, all detecting devices and not “heat-seekers”, plus they required a large amount of human interaction in order to work effectively. Vesco mentions that *Feuerball* was attracted by exhaust flames, and this would suggest that some sort of heat-seeking technology was incorporated in the weapon’s design. There would not have been room to install an infra-red searchlight in the device, and even if it had been possible, a *Bildwandler* would also have had to be fitted with the resulting image being interpreted somehow onboard the craft itself, with a resulting change in direction and/or altitude where necessary or transmitted to a ground operator who steered the weapon remotely. There is no evidence that this type of technology was fitted in any operational aircraft or missile system.

Some limited research was carried out into infra-red seekers in Germany during WW2. A very early system known only as *Hamburg* was developed for the Blohm und Voss Bv 143 radio-controlled glide-bomb into the world’s first “fire-and-forget” weapon, whereby it could be launched and would guide itself to the target without further control from the operator onboard the bomber aircraft.[973] The Bv 143 possessed an elongated downward-facing probe which provided indication of when it was about to hit the sea, and at that point a solid-fuelled rocket would ignite and propel it rapidly towards its target vessel, giving enemy gunners little chance to shoot it down. Later examples were fitted with a radio altimeter which negated the use of the probe.[974] The *Hamburg* system would have allowed the glide-bomb to find its target via the latter’s infra-red signature and alter course as required before reaching the altitude where the rocket motor ignited. However, extensive testing discovered that the Bv 143 flew too slowly during its initial air-dropped flight phase, allowing the target to be lost by the seeker’s “head”. The project was abandoned in 1943 in favour of the much more promising Henschel Hs 293, which will be discussed in relation to another of Vesco’s claims.

Another missile project designed to use infra-red seeking systems built by the Germans in WW2 was the Messerschmitt *Enzian* ("Gentian") surface-to-air missile. In 1943, there were increasing doubts that the company's Me 163 *Komet* rocket-propelled interceptor would be effective in combat, primarily because of its very limited endurance once airborne, but also due to its extremely high speed, preventing accurate acquisition, aiming, and firing at enemy bombers. Plans for a missile were drawn up, one which would explode at a point just ahead of the bomber stream. It was hoped this would destroy several aircraft in one detonation. The new missile resembled a smaller, more streamlined Me 163 fuselage fitted with a pair of swept-back wings together with dorsal and ventral tail fins. As it was unmanned, there was no requirement to limit the take-off velocity, so four Schmidding solid-fuel booster rockets were grouped around the fuselage exterior, providing an extremely rapid launch. Once their fuel was exhausted, the small Walter RI-10B liquid-fuelled sustainer rocket, using a combination of mixed acids and petrol as a propellant, would power *Enzian* towards its target. A modified 88mm *Flak* gun mounting, with the gun removed and a long narrow metal rail fitted in its place, served as a launcher for the new missile.[975]

Enzian was to be guided towards the bomber stream by *Kehl-Straßburg* radio link and then placed at a point in front of the enemy aircraft before turning and flying into their formation, whereupon the warhead would be detonated, this being achieved via a separate communication link. It was known early on in the project that the missile would be difficult to guide in its terminal phase, especially as the mission profile called for a curved approach. *Enzian* was plagued by problems with its *Fuchs* ("Fox") radio proximity fuse and associated ground receiver.[976] For the final run into the bomber formation, two different methods were developed, each employing an early form of what is now known as "terminal guidance". The first was a small, self-contained radar system known as *Elsass* ("Alsace"), using a *Rüse* ("Soot") transponder for tracking and a *Kehl-Straßburg* radio link to transmit commands to the weapon.[977]

The second was an infra-red seeker, codenamed *Madrid*. Very little is known about this latter system, other than it used a number of telescope mirrors and only a test-bench example was completed before the whole *Enzian* project was shut down in late January 1945 due to lack of progress. Thirty-eight test missiles had been fired up until that point, all in daylight hours.[978] If it had become operational, *Enzian* could have been mistaken for a *Komet*, accounting for "Me 163" sightings by RAF night bomber crews and the American night-fighter units in Europe. However, since the project was unsuccessful, it is extremely doubtful that testing examples were fired at night or against live targets in the shape of RAF bombers or USAAF night-fighters.

At some stage prior to *Enzian's* cancellation, the *Fuchs* proximity fuse was replaced with an infra-red system known as *Paplitz*, which had been developed by the *Elektro-akustischem Institut* ("Electro-Acoustic Institute") at Namslau for the EMW *Wasserfall* ("Waterfall") and Hs 117 *Schmetterling* ("Butterfly") surface-to-air missiles. It detected heat emissions from aircraft engines and exhausts but testing in January 1945 showed that the system could only be used at night due to solar radiation interfering with guidance of the missile.[979] *Paplitz* was therefore never put into production, although given that *Enzian* was about to be cancelled, it did not prove to be much of a setback. Of course, if realised, it could have been a likely candidate for a guidance system fitted to Vesco's alleged *Feuerball* device. Other infra-red systems were under development during the war, including *Doppellinse* ("Double Lens"), *Emden* and *Glühwurmchen* ("Firefly"), but even less is known about these and they presumably did not leave the test bench or maybe even the drawing board.[980]

More details on *Feuerball* followed in Vesco's book. The FFO were apparently responsible for development of the weapon's radio control system, as there would need to be some method of steering it towards the bomber formations once it left the ground. The author relied upon an account from an unnamed witness who apparently saw an early *Feuerball* test flight with its electronics yet to be

installed, stating that *"during the day it looked like a shining disc spinning on its axis and during the night it looked like a burning globe."*[981] Also, according to Vesco, *Reichsmarschall* Herman Goering, head of the *Luftwaffe*, turned up on several occasions to carry out personal inspections of the work being done on the device.[982] He wanted *Feuerball* to be turned into a war-winning weapon, one that revolutionised the field of aerial warfare.

The Americans captured the various FFO facilities at the end of April 1945, and two months later the Combined Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee (CIOS) released *Evaluation Report No.156* which detailed what information and equipment was discovered, the different types of research that was being carried out at the various sites that came under the FFO "umbrella" and the names of the department heads. It makes for interesting reading, though anyone believing that it confirms the existence of *Feuerball* or *Kugelblitz* will be disappointed. Eight separate facilities were identified, at Oberpfaffenhofen, Grafelfing, Planegg, Gauting, Hersching, Waldstadt, Patscherkofel and Hafelkor.[983] The last two were located near Innsbruck in Austria and had no permanent staff, whilst Hersching was the site of the FFO's library. Across at Oberpfaffenhofen, the site where Vesco claimed that *Feuerball* was designed, the only recorded work carried out there was anti-"Window" devices, i.e. apparatus to defeat Allied jamming, plus pulse altimeters. It was however the site of the FFO's drawing office so design work could conceivably well have been carried out there. The documents contained at the FFO's library contained at Schloss Ried at Hersching were burned shortly before the Americans could capture them, according to a *Dr*. Kanzler who was in charge of the facility.[984] I suspect if Vesco had obtained a copy of this report, he simply included Oberpfaffenhofen as a plausible location for development of a fictitious secret weapon, knowing full well that much of the organisation's paperwork had been destroyed as the war drew to a close. In addition, since his book was not published until more than twenty years after the end of the war, it was likely that many of the personnel connected with the FFO were dead or in

extreme old age and therefore hardly anyone would be in a position to contradict his claims.

The Russians reached Austria's eastern border on 29th March 1945 and Soviet forces took Wiener Neustadt four days later. Vesco claimed that when it was clear that nothing would stop the enemy advance into Austria, construction of the first *Feuerball* devices was transferred to underground facilities in the *Schwarzwald* ("Black Forest"), operated by Zeppelin Werke. He also stated that the *Forschungsanstalt der Deutschen Reichspost* (FDRP, or the "Research Institute of the German Post Service") outposts at Aach bei Radolfzell on the Bodensee (Lake Constance) and Gehlberg was responsible for supplying Klystron tubes to the project. Vesco seems to become confused at this point about the various FDRP outstations. He claims that tubes manufactured at Gehlberg, an FDRP outpost, were *"not as perfect as those delivered by the FDRP, a fact that caused a number of Feuerballs to be used simultaneously in formation."*[985] The technology needed to operate several weapons in close contact with each other would have also been beyond the capabilities of German research at that time.

The town of Radolfzell lies at the western end of the Bodensee, and there is a river nearby called the Aach. Aach bei Radolfzell was certainly a real facility, as CIOS investigative teams turned up to search the buildings and interrogate staff in early July 1945. According to the report that was submitted, the research laboratories were working on televisions, control of glide bombs, electron multipliers, Klystrons, magnetrons and a device called *Hela*, a broad-band intercept receiver. Information gathered by the Allied teams seemed to suggest that the FDRP worked on something called *Feuerball*, but it was not Renato Vesco's potentially war-winning aerial *flak* mine:

"A single klystron had been developed here (…) Five or six tubes were constructed at the Dienstelle [department], no quantity production being carried out anywhere.

The few tubes made were employed by the Luftwaffe in the Feuerballe [sic] jammer, used for jamming H2S, the frequency range being 8.6 to 9.3cm. The whole of the Feuerballe jammer was developed at the Dienstelle, with the exception of the antenna. It was reported that one of these sets had been used at Leuna."[986]

This appears to be the only proven link between Vesco's book, *Feuerball* and the FDRP at Aach bei Radolfzell to date. The I. G. Farben Leunawerke synthetic oil plant, established at Leuna in Saxony-Anhalt, is mentioned in the CIOS evaluation report. However, Vesco claimed that in order to keep the *flak* mine project a secret whilst it was still under development, the codename *Feuerball* was also issued to a ground-control radar system, one which was used in defence of the synthetic oil facility. [987] As the war dragged on and Germany's stocks of imported oil dried up, synthetic oil derived from brown coal tar was vitally important to the war effort. Fuel shortages had begun to hamper the armed forces' ability to fight effectively as early as autumn 1944. The Leuna *flak* defences were understandably formidable, and an equally good radar system would have been necessary to support them. However, instead of a ground-control radar, as explained in the CIOS report, *Feuerball* was a jamming system, designed to interfere with British blind bombing systems such as Oboe, utilising a "funnel" antenna with a 70° sweep, and believed effective up to 30km. It did employ a Klystron tube, adequate enough for simple jamming, which covered the frequencies between 9.0 and 9.6cm, operating on peak power of about 3kW. Apparently, a few sets, working in conjunction with experimental FuG 351 *Corfu* receivers, were installed at Leuna in March 1945, although by that stage their effect on events was negligible.[988]

The author's claims about the FDRP supplying klystrons for *Feuerball* is simply repeated in other books and websites without question. Vesco omits his source for this information and again readers are expected to take his claims at face value, although it is more than likely that the name *Feuerball* was lifted from what was an obscure, if not possibly still secret CIOS report when he was writing

his book. The name of this little-known WW2 jamming system may well have served as the basis for Vesco's device.

Turning to the underground factories in the Black Forest which Vesco claimed were where the first *Feuerballen* were built, it is true that Zeppelin Werke did move some of its work out of its Friedrichshafen plant, located on the northern shore of the Bodensee, to subterranean facilities such as the huge *Mittelwerk* complex in the Harz Mountains.[989] However, this was nowhere near the Black Forest, and the only underground factory in the area appears to have been the Engelberg tunnels located west of Stuttgart. This facility used two closed-off *autobahn* tunnels for the production of wings for the Me 262 jet fighter, built by forced labourers who were brought there from Natzweiller-Struthof concentration camp in Alsace.[990] Of course, other much smaller factories may have existed. However, in recent years, studies of underground facilities have been very thorough, and it appears that Zeppelin Werke did not have anything located in the area.

Vesco seems to suggest that production of *Feuerball* was only moved from Austria to the Black Forest once the Russians drew close. That would have been around the beginning of March 1945. If so, then it was moved from one threatened sector to another, as the French First Army reached the northern part of the *Schwarzwald* in early April 1945, and it was then only a matter of time before they overran the entire region. Moving *Feuerball* assembly from Austria across to the Black Forest would have disrupted production lines and once re-started, a new plant may have only been in operation for a few days or weeks before having to move again or be threatened with capture.

Another claim made by Vesco relates to a series of "underground airfields" that were constructed by concentration camp inmates in the Iglingerwald, near Landsberg am Lech, just west of the Ammersee in Bavaria. He stated in *Intercept* that these airfields were needed to protect the "north-central" edge of the so-called *Alpenfestung* (or "Alpine Fortress", known to the Allies as the "Alpine Redoubt"), the much-rumoured last redoubt of the Nazis in Bavaria, the north of

Italy and western Austria.[991] The initial idea behind this last-ditch area of resistance is credited to *SS-Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler in 1943, but Hitler never gave the plan any serious consideration, and no real attempt to establish it was ever made. However, as Allied forces moved to within striking distance of Germany's borders, rumours of production facilities and combat units being withdrawn to the mythical *Festung* were sanctioned by Josef Goebbels, Minister for Propaganda, hoping to exaggerate its actual effectiveness and readiness state. The idea of a Nazi hold-out certainly took root in the minds of senior Allied commanders, who were persuaded to send more of their forces into western and southern Germany, blunting attacks elsewhere. However, by the end of March 1945 it was realised that the "Alpine Redoubt" simply did not exist, reports of fortifications (including underground airfields) being stories made up to support the myth of a last-ditch stand by the Nazis.[992]

Vesco made a further claim to the effect that the reason why Allied pilots were encountering "Foo Fighters" over western and southern Germany was that *Feuerball* had been employed to harass and hamper their night reconnaissance missions. These were apparently *"fanning out dangerously close to Bavaria"*, where the secret underground airfield construction was taking place.[993] He stated in *Intercept* that the facility, built in the *Iglingerwald*, consisted of three huge underground airfields.[994] The first one, apparently known as "Construction No.1", was supposed to hold an assembly line for the Me 163 *Komet* rocket-powered interceptor and Me 262 jet fighter. Few details were provided for the others, although Vesco did make claims about one of them:

"One of the secondary airfields was supposed to serve also as the operating base for pilotless rocket fighters in a state of advanced preparation at the Messerschmitt factories in Oberammergau, and for other revolutionary types of anti-aircraft weaponry 'related' to today's UFOs that were being developed by the Zeppelin Werke under contract to the SS Technical General Staff but were still not ready for large-scale use."[995]

There was one final claim about the underground airfields. Vesco stated that excavation work on the first site had been completed in the second half of February 1945. It appears that he employed an existing facility as the basis for one of these subterranean airfields. Halfway between Igling and nearby Landsberg am Lech, three large semi-underground bunkers were constructed as part of the *Ringeltaube* ("Woodpigeon") armaments project, which saw Messerschmitt move production from its large factory airfield at Augsburg. The plant there had been repeatedly bombed to the point of destruction. Built in the *Frauenwald* near Landsberg, the bunkers were to house production lines for the Me 262, but only one, codenamed *Weingut II* ("Vineyard II") was ever completed. A huge hole was dug out of the ground, filled with gravel and a three metre thick layer of concrete poured on top. Once the concrete had set firm, the gravel was removed to create a large underground space, big enough to establish a five-storey factory inside.[996]

The other two bunkers, *Diana II* and *Walnuss II* ("Walnut II") were never completed. Work on the latter was halted in January 1945 so that resources could be concentrated on the other two. Only the first segment of *Diana II* had been completed by the end of the war. If both of these had been finished, component manufacture for the Do 335 *Pfeil* "push-pull" fighter and Focke-Wulf Ta 152 high-altitude fighter would also have taken place at these locations.[997] It seems therefore that Vesco was correct in stating that one had been excavated, although the facts about the *Ringeltaube* facilities were clearly embellished by the Italian in order to fit in with his overall narrative.

Igling is located on flat land to the north-west of Landsberg am Lech, about 50km west of Munich. There is forest nearby, but it is not known as the *Iglingerwald*, nor is it on the scale required to hide construction of an underground airfield. Vesco alleges that hurriedly-arranged flight tests were carried out at Fürstenfeldbrucke Airfield using Messerschmitt fighters in order to calculate the exact minimum take-off distances required. This was alleged to allow the designers

of the underground airfields to build a sufficient length of covered runway. According to a footnote to his chapter *Mysterious Night Lights over the Rhineland*, Vesco wrote the following:

"Thus small oblong artificial hills would be created, heavily covered with grassy and woodland vegetation, surrounded by irregular layers simulating natural elevations in the terrain in order to baffle aerial reconnaissance."[998]

Whilst a sub-camp of Dachau concentration camp was established at Igling and this was located in the woods just south of the village, construction of a secret facility does not appear to have taken place there, unlike the work being carried out a few kilometres away at the *Weingut II* facility.[999]

Vesco included another footnote stating that even though effective camouflage had hidden the building work from RAF daylight photo-reconnaissance aircraft, intelligence service agents had heard rumours about the project. Despite the area being *"photographed foot by foot"* on the strength of these reports, no trace of any construction programme could be found. According to the author, the final report by RAF Benson's Photographic Intelligence Section stated, *"If the aerodromes really exist, they are completely invisible from the air."*[1000] It is much more likely that the absence of evidence proved that they never existed in the first place. Neither location ever had "underground airfields" or oblong-shaped artificial hills that hid runways. However, this did not stop the Italian from one final absurd statement:

"They operated within 100 yards of the Allied Armies for several months, yet were never discovered, even though Allied aeroplanes passed over the area almost every day."[1001]

This either means that the front line did not move in that location for several months or the facility ended up behind the Allied lines and

yet still continued to operate. To suggest either of these things was effectively treating the readership of *Intercept* as idiots.

To end this section on *Feuerball*, let us return to Vesco's statements about how the device was radio-controlled from take-off and would follow Allied aircraft, supposedly *"attracted by their engine exhausts".* We can follow a theoretical launch and discuss the various elements required from a successful flight. The fact that Germany was developing radio-controlled weapons is not disputed. In 1938, work began on producing a guided version of the standard PC 1400 *Fritz* armour-piercing bomb, fitted with a *Kehl-Straßburg* radio link, allowing the operator onboard a bomber to steer the weapon via moveable control fins. Antenna for a FuG 228 *Straßburg* receiver[1002] were fitted on the fins as well, picking up signals from the bomber's FuG 203 *Kehl* set.[1003] *Fritz X*, as the radio-controlled bomb was known when it was deployed operationally in the Mediterranean in July 1943, was the world's first precision-guided munition ("smart bomb").[1004]

Fritz X was not the only such weapon developed by the Germans in WW2. In 1941, Henschel, known for producing locomotives and liaison aircraft, and just beginning to mass-produce the Pz.Kpfw III tank, inherited design studies on an unpowered glider bomb. With the addition of a Walter 109-507 single use rocket motor, the project was designated Hs 293. It was effectively a small aircraft, consisting of a SC 500 bomb casing for the nose, a mid-section with gyroscopes and radio-guidance equipment, and finally the rocket exhaust installed in the tail. The Walter rocket motor was fitted in a separate housing suspended below the weapon's rear fuselage. The Hs 293 was designed from the outset to be radio-controlled, again using the *Kehl-Straßburg* system used by *Fritz X*, but this time moving the "aircraft's" elevators and ailerons. Intended to be dropped from an He 111 or He 177 bomber, the glide bomb would fall free for two seconds before the Walter rocket motor fired for around ten more, accelerating the weapon to 250 metres per second. The weapons operator in the bomber used a small joystick to guide the Hs 293, which carried smokeless flares in its tailplane to

assist observation at increased distances. Testing began in December 1940 at the *Erprobungsstelle* at Peenemünde-West, using a derelict vessel moored in the Baltic Sea. The maximum range was around 12km, although in operational conditions this would reduce to between 4 and 9km, depending on the altitude the glide bomb was launched from. Whilst design work had started much later than *Fritz X*, the Hs 293's combat debut was only a month afterwards, when the sloops HMS *Bideford* and HMS *Egret* were hit in the Bay of Biscay towards the end of August 1954 (with *Egret* being sunk). Losses continued among Allied shipping throughout the remainder of 1943 and into the spring of 1944.[1005]

The Germans had other radio-controlled missiles under development. Henschel were also working on the Hs 294, a more streamlined version of the Hs 293 but still operated by the same *Kehl-Straßburg* system. Dropped in the same fashion as the Hs 293, it was designed to be guided into the water, whereupon the wings would break off and the weapon would run, torpedo-like, to its target vessel.[1006] Henschel also designed the Hs 298 air-to-air missile, a small, mid-winged "aircraft" with twin tail fins and a 48kg warhead, powered by a Schmidding 109-543 solid-fuel rocket. It also used the same radio-link used in the company's earlier projects. The weapon required two crewmen to operate it successfully, which limited it to larger launch platforms. The first missile ever designed for air-to-air combat, the Hs 298 was unsuccessfully test-fired in December 1944 and the project was shelved in favour of the more promising Ruhrstahl X-4.[1007] There was also the large surface-to-air missile known as *Rheintochter* ("Rhine Maiden"); developed by Rheinmetall-Borsig, it was a two-stage, solid-fuelled rocket armed with a 136kg warhead. At least three versions were tested, the last one sporting a liquid-fuelled rocket motor as its main powerplant, with jettisonable solid-fuel booster rockets being fitted. No less than five different radio-control guidance systems were also developed for *Rheintochter*, codenamed *Burgund*, *Franken*, *Alsace*, *Brabant* and *Ganza*, although none were developed enough to be used during testing.[1008]

Only *Fritz X* and the Hs 293 were used in combat, although their effectiveness was relatively short-lived as the Allies quickly introduced jammers to disrupt their *Kehl-Straßburg* radio-control systems. This was carried out from April 1944 onwards, the bombs then seeing fewer positive results, although the *Luftwaffe* would use Hs 293s in attacks on shipping during the Normandy invasion and also in a last-ditch attempt to destroy bridges over the River Oder in April 1945 to prevent Russian spearheads rolling on Berlin. The Hs 293 was re-developed into a wire-guided weapon to try to defeat the jamming. In addition, Fernseh AG (a pre-war television company), together with the *Forschungsanstalt der Deutschen Reichspost* ("Research Institute of the German Post Service", as mentioned earlier in connection with Radolfzell) joined forces to develop a television guidance system for the Hs 293. This resulted in *Tonne A* ("Ton A"), consisting of a miniature camera tube, pulse generator and video amplifier, all contained within a 17x17x40cm housing that was fitted into the glider bomb's nose. Signals were transmitted to a television screen in the launch aircraft, allowing the operator to control the missile after the bomber had turned away from its target. [1009] Unfortunately for the Germans, development work was still underway when the war ended.[1010] As for *Rheintochter*, although some 82 successful launches were made, performance was not as good as expected. The last test firings were carried out from Peenemünde in early 1945 before the entire site was vacated in February of that year to prevent the Russians capturing the scientific and engineering teams based there, and all work on the project ceased.[1011]

The Germans, therefore, were working on a plethora of missile projects that involved some level of radio-control. But which system did Vesco's *Feuerball*, allegedly the source of "Foo Fighter" reports, employ? He never gave any details. Of course, given its radical shape and mission profile, the weapon would have had to be closely monitored throughout its flight otherwise it would have been useless. In order to approach enemy bombers in the first place, the *Feuerball* launch site would have had to be tied into the local *Luftwaffe* air

defence radar network so that effective early warning of their approach could be received. A single enemy aircraft or a group of targets within range would presumably have been selected and the orders to fire given. Vesco's "aerial *flak* mine" would somehow have been launched into the air, although again even that is unclear, based on the available information. He does not give any details about the method used, so it is unclear whether the device was supposed to be launched from a rail on a converted *flak* gun mounting, as was the case with the Henschel Hs 117 *Schmetterling*, or just directly from the ground. A number of other German surface-to-air missile projects, such as Messerschmitt's *Enzian*, a further radio-controlled design, were also launched from narrow rails fitted to modified 105mm or 128mm *flak* gun mounts.[1012] However, it is hard to work out how a "tortoise shell-shaped" object such as *Feuerball* would be mounted on such launchers, let alone fired into the air.

Skipping past this obstacle, the weapon was now hurtling towards its target, propelled by Vesco's "special turbojet". With thrust from the jet engine propelling the "*flak* mine" higher and higher, the device must not have been able to spin on its axis, otherwise it would become completely uncontrollable, and yet no obvious control surfaces were fitted to help the ground operator steer it towards the target. Beyond opening and closing venturi on the surface of the *Feuerball*, it is difficult to work out how the weapon could be flown with any degree of accuracy, although to achieve some sort of stability, there would have to be multiple vents located all over the surface of the device so that the operator could limit thrust to one direction to alter course. Steering in a three-dimensional environment, at night and many kilometres away from its launch site, with no obvious method of "seeing" exactly where the weapon was in relation to its target aircraft, would surely have made controlling *Feuerball* extremely difficult, if not impossible. Several thrust vectors would also need to be employed at once as it would have been impractical to simply operate in an "up/down, left/right" mode. The work required to achieve any decent level of control in such a device

would have been enormous. The Hs 293D's television camera would no doubt have provided a welcome addition to the device's list of onboard kit, although surely even its miniaturised dimensions would not have been able to fit inside the already tightly-packed "tortoise shell"?

There is always the possibility that a theoretical *Feuerball* device may have used a different control device to ensure it flew to within striking distance of the RAF night bombers. The Germans deployed at least two different sets of equipment that could "home" in on the various electronic emissions from the four-engined "heavies", and they offered mixed results. The first was FuG 227 *Flensburg*, a passive radar receiver that could pick up the subharmonics of the transmitting frequency used by the Monica tail warning radar.[1013] Most RAF heavy bombers were fitted with this set, and after one was shot down in February 1943, less than two months following Monica's entry into service, a team at Siemens & Halske set about trying to develop a counter-measure. *Flensburg* was introduced in January 1944 and the bomber loss rate soon increased, reaching a new high of twelve per cent on the night of the Nürnberg raid on 30th March. The second was a set that "homed" in on emissions from the bombers' H2S centimetric radar navigation equipment. This was FuG 350 *Naxos*, which showed a greater range than *Flensburg* in tests although in service, sets proved to be problematic. Crews found them difficult to use and results were varied.[1014]

In the end, both *Flensburg* and *Naxos* were succesfully countermanded by the British, courtesy of a windfall that occurred in July 1944. An off-course Junkers Ju 88G night-fighter landed in error at RAF Woodbridge in Suffolk, and the crew were unable to destroy their aircraft before they realised their mistake. The Junkers carried *Lichtenstein SN2*, *Flensburg* and *Naxos*. All three sets were studied in depth, resulting in the Monica tail warning radar being removed from RAF bombers, the creation of a new variant of Window (small strips of metal foil cut to half the wavelength of the enemy radar equipment) and an instruction for crews to only use H2S when absolutely necessary.[1015] The mythical *Feuerball* could have carried

Naxos or an equivalent device, possibly its more accurate successor, FuG 351 *Corfu* (which was not developed in time for service before the end of the war) in order to approach RAF Halifax and Lancaster bombers more successfully, but Vesco omits any mention of these. [1016]

There is also the small matter of Vesco's claim that several devices had to fly in formation due to their sub-standard quality Klystron tubes.[1017] One has only to see the various problems that German scientists and engineers faced in trying to launch a single surface-to-air missile and then position it accurately enough to inflict damage or destruction on an enemy bomber fleet. These issues were hard enough to solve for missiles powered by conventional rocket motors. The Italian author's *Feuerball* was essentially a ball fitted with a radical turbojet, and therefore the challenges regarding positioning and interception would most certainly have multiplied since it was devoid of control surfaces. Radio links could also be jammed, and infra-red "homing" technology was still in its infancy, with no useful devices having been produced. How then could a device as sophisticated as *Feuerball* be flown in something approaching a formation against a bomber stream, when it would have been difficult just to get one of them where the operator wished it to be, let alone several operating together? Of course, Vesco did not provide an answer to this question in *Intercept*.

Renato Vesco had an answer for those asking why Allied air gunners could not simply shoot down the "Foo Fighters" that were following their aircraft over the skies of Occupied Europe. According to the author, under the armoured layer was a thin sheet of electrically insulated aluminium that acted as a switch. If a bullet pierced the exterior armour, contact between the two layers was established and a circuit was closed, which invoked maximum acceleration of the *Feuerball*, *"generally in an upward direction".* This allegedly removed the device from further potential harm. He also claimed that *Feuerball* carried an explosive charge inside its armoured casing. According to the author, the following was installed:

"The Foo Fighters did contain a strong explosive charge to destroy them in flight in case serious damage to the automatic guidance system made it impossible for the operators to control it."[1018]

So, in addition to having a "tripwire" that sent the *Feuerball* flying upwards if bullets hit its armoured shell, there were also explosives onboard which could, if said tripwire failed, destroy the device? This war-winning device appeared to be jam-packed with technological goodies. Vesco claimed that the device was the explanation for the "Foo Fighter" sightings in late 1944 and early 1945. His descriptions of onboard explosives and automatic reflex responses demonstrated that he had no knowledge of the earlier RAF sightings, especially the crew of Sgt. Konstanty Sobiński's Wellington in March 1942, where mysterious lights were fired upon. The Polish gunners fired on the object that was following them, but the bullets seemed to enter it without any noticeable effect. If a prototype *Feuerball* had encountered the Polish bomber on that evening, either its "tripwire" was not working, or its explosives had not been installed. It is much more likely that whatever the crew encountered was not a German aerial *flak* mine.

The question that the Italian author did not answer was how did a tortoise shell-shaped object packed with Klystron tubes, a radical turbojet, fuel tanks, special armour, and an explosive charge, physically get off the ground in the first place without anything resembling aerodynamic control surfaces? If one believes Vesco's descriptions of its onboard kit, *Feuerball* must have been a heavy object given that so much was packed inside its armoured shell. Yet even if somehow it had been able to become airborne, the question was how the device could be controlled accurately in flight, considering its lack of control surfaces. The "special turbojet" and control systems must have been extremely sophisticated indeed in order to get the object to the altitude and proximity of the bomber stream. If the Germans had been capable of such technological advances, they would surely have been able to employ them in other

devices too. Yet no evidence exists that special jet engines or accurate control systems were ever developed.

Did *Feuerball* ever exist? No independent information, documentation or imagery has ever been located outside of Vesco's book, and the details he provides are woefully incomplete. Even the basics, such as the launch method, control mechanism and proximity fuse type are not mentioned. Neither are the launch sites, what ground equipment was required in order to operate one, or how many personnel were needed. The Italian author offers absolutely no evidence to confirm that the *Feuerball* project existed, whether as a project or a fully-operational system. Even secret German weapons projects were fully documented by their design staff, whether this was simply official confirmation from the *Reichsministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion*, orders requesting materials or personnel, or design drawings. Information relating to German secret weapons projects usually survived in some shape or form. In many cases, there were some attempts to destroy paperwork and completed prototypes, but in all of these cases enough details remained so that post-war historians and enthusiasts could piece together what had been developed. *Feuerball*, as in the *flak* mine, only ever appeared in the pages of *Intercettateli senza sparare*.

In his book *The Hunt For Zero Point*, Nick Cook devoted five pages to Vesco's claims.[1019] During a conversation in 2021, he stated that he placed more credence in the possibility of a *flak* mine than the claims regarding disc-shaped aircraft. He had read through numerous reports relating to German research on such items as sensors that could detect changes in polarity in the air caused by aircraft movement, remote controlled aircraft and anti-aircraft "rays", together with devices allegedly able to interfere with ignition systems at range of 2-3km. Whilst Nick conceded that whilst many of these projects are still to be perfected today, he suggested it was possible that one or more may have progressed to the point where they could have been bench-tested. However, he also wondered what degree of overlay the Allied technical intelligence officers had used when writing their reports.[1020] It is also conceivable that the German

scientists interviewed in their compilation had exaggerated the scale or progress of their work, hoping to persuade their captors to allow them to continue their research. It is also possible that the intelligence staff had demonstrated unconscious bias in favour of the "miracle weapons" being discovered across the *Reich*. Nick believed that the main problem would have been the integration of the various elements that were claimed as part of *Feuerball*. I agree with his assessment in this regard, citing the difficulties Germany had in developing less-complicated weapons such as ground-to-air missile systems.

Unfortunately, *Feuerball* was not the only top-secret device that Vesco claimed was responsible for the "Foo Fighter" sightings. Let's go further down this wartime rabbit hole in search of the truth regarding his claims.

Chapter 14:
Kugelblitz

A moment later, the American bombers mysteriously caught fire, exploding in the air, while the German 'rocket' had already disappeared over the horizon.

- Alleged deployment of a "Foo Fighter"-type weapon in 1945.

Not content with providing a scoop about one hitherto completely unknown yet potentially war-winning weapon, Vesco proceeded to claim knowledge of another. This was the *Kugelblitz* ("Ball Lighting") fighter, a project that apparently took the technology used in the creation of *Feuerball* one stage further, incorporating several revolutionary electronic devices. However, unlike *Feuerball*, which had a fairly long description, the explanation of *Kugelblitz* only warranted a single page.[1021]

Before going any further, Vesco's *Kugelblitz* should not be confused with the self-propelled tracked anti-aircraft vehicle that was developed by the Germans in the final year of the war. This was armed with twin 30mm MK 103 cannon, fitted into a specially-designed so-called "oscillating" turret mounted on a modified Pz.Kpfw. IV chassis. Only five examples of this *Flakpanzer* were built before the end of the war but at least one is believed to have seen combat in Thuringia, and one or more of the others may have saw action in the last-ditch defence of Berlin in late April 1945.[1022] It is highly unlikely that Vesco, as a supposed aircraft engineer, would have been aware of the existence of the little-known *Flakpanzer* when he wrote his book in the early 1950s.

Under the sub-heading *The "Ball Lightning" Automatic Fighter*, Vesco claimed that *Reichsmarschall* Goering's pressing demands for production of a "decisive" fighter aircraft, had not only been agreed to by the SS Technical General Staff, *"but had implemented them by*

having all the aeronautic advances of the past two years sent to the industrial combine of the G-Werke." The result, therefore, was *Kugelblitz*. Described as a "symmetrical circular aircraft", it came complete with an impressive list of onboard capabilities. In Vesco's own words, this revolutionary weapon offered the following:

"Thus the principle of the circular aircraft was combined with direct gyroscopic stabilization; synthetic firedamp was combined with the multiple-batteried blower cannon; a gelatinous organic metallic hyper-combustible was combined with the total reaction turbine; television flying was combined with vertical take-off and landing; armour that was sensitive to small-calibre projectiles and radio control that was free of enemy jamming were combined with the active blinding of enemy radar; infra-red 'search eyes' were combined with electrostatic weapon firing."[1023]

According to the device's specifications, it should have been a complete game-changer in terms of the air war over Europe, and yet before *Intercept* was published, no-one had ever heard of it. If anyone did have knowledge of it in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in the time between when Vesco supposedly completed his book and its eventual publication, why were they not coming forward with details, a decade or more after the end of the war? As with *Feuerball*, the lack of corroborative evidence was telling. Not surprisingly, Vesco did not include any relevant footnotes that might have shed light on where he had obtained his details from.

The Italian author was correct in his assertion that the *Luftwaffe* were looking for a "decisive" fighter aircraft with which to turn the tide of the air battle over Europe. The advent of USAAF Republic P-47 Thunderbolt and North American P-51 Mustang escort fighters in late 1943 had seen the skies swept of German aircraft in ever-increasing numbers as each month passed. The existing *Luftwaffe* piston-engined day fighter fleet, made up of Bf 109s and Fw 190s, was losing the battle. Experienced pilots were being lost to severe injuries sustained in combat, and others were killed in action, Those

who remained, together with newly-trained pilots and transfers from disbanded bomber units, tried in vain to stem the tide. Although the "push-pull" Dornier Do 335 *Pfeil* and the operational jet- and rocket-powered types such as the Me 262 and Me 163 *Komet* offered significant increases in performance over the piston-engined P-47s and P-51s, development of these new types had not gone smoothly. The Germans were not looking for something resembling a "Foo Fighter" to solve their problems. Nor were they throwing resources into flying discs. The solution was found in aircraft less sophisticated than the jet fighters they had already developed. It was a retrograde path, one borne out of frustration and desperation.

In the late summer of 1944, the *Technischen Amt* ("Technical Department") of the RLM decided to embark upon the *Jägernotprogramm* ("Emergency Fighter Programme"), based on the *Luftwaffe's* appeal for new high-performance aircraft.[1024] Although the existing Me 262s were considered as potentially war-winning aircraft, their construction was slow, and they were difficult to maintain. Backed by *Reichsmarschall* Goering, the *Jägernotprogramm* was effectively two separate competitions for new jet or pulse-jet powered fighter designs, which could be built quickly using a much less skilled workforce, resulting in aircraft that could simply be discarded if they broke down whilst in service. On 8th September 1944, a specification for a *Volksjäger* ("People's Fighter") was issued, listing an endurance of at least thirty minutes, construction to use a minimum of strategic materials, and mass production to be carried out by a semi-skilled labour force, one which would not impact upon the existing manufacturing of the Me 262 and Arado Ar 234 *Blitz*. The armament was limited to two 30mm cannon and the engine was to be a single BMW 109-003 turbojet, the lesser-powered of the two designs currently available at the time.

The RLM wanted the winning design to be ready for mass production by 1st January 1945. Despite this limited timeframe, four companies submitted designs, and despite the Blohm und Voss P.211 being favourite to win, the Heinkel P.1073 secured the RLM contract just three weeks after the specification had been issued.

[1025] Heinkel may have won because the company had been planning a light-weight fighter for some time and had managed to produce a wooden mock-up just before the competition ended. The first prototype, designated He 162, first flew on 6th December 1944, just 69 days after the specification had first been issued. The BMW turbojet was located on top of the fuselage, level with the wings, the latter having anhedral tips. The tailplane had sharp dihedral, with twin, inward-canted fins. The He 162 sat on a tricycle undercarriage, and the pilot sat on a cartridge-powered ejector seat, only the second wartime aircraft type ever to be fitted with one.[1026] Suggestions were made that *Hitler Jugend* ("Hitler Youth") members with previous flying experience limited only to gliders could be taught to fly the *Volksjäger* without any hours learning to operate piston-engined training aircraft, but this dangerous notion was quickly shelved before recruits could be let loose on the high performance jets.

It is not known exactly how many *Volksjäger* were built, although some 120 were delivered and a further 200 were undergoing manufacture in underground assembly lines at Hinterbrühl in Austria and *Mittelwerk* in the Harz Mountains. A photo taken in the captured Hinterbrühl plant shows at least fifty fuselages in an incomplete state.[1027] No less than 46 *Volksjäger* were delivered to *Erprobungskommando* 162 ("Test Unit 162") at Rechlin in January 1945 and just a month later, the first aircraft were taken on charge by I./JG 1. Bombing raids forced the unit to move airfields several times, and a lack of fuel hampered conversion to the new jets, so much so that the first pilots were not considered operational until mid-April 1945.[1028]

The second element of the *Jägernotprogramm* was known as the *Miniaturjägerprogramm* ("Miniature Fighter Programme"), a competition to select an even smaller, less sophisticated and cheaper interceptor aircraft. The specifications were released in November 1944, calling for a machine that could be put into mass production using only a very basic number of strategic materials, with large numbers of aircraft being envisaged to simultaneously

intercept the enemy bombers in an attempt to swamp their escorts. The powerplant was to be a single Argus As 014 pulse-jet, as fitted to the V-1 flying bomb. However, very little interest was shown by the German aircraft industry, possibly because they were gearing up to begin construction of the new He 162. Any potential winner was therefore unlikely to secure much production space for the new *Miniaturjäger*. There was little room within the *Reich's* dwindling factory capacity to introduce the tooling required for another new aircraft type.

Although Blohm und Voss, Heinkel and Junkers all submitted proposals for the second contest, it was clear from previous studies that the Argus pulse-jet simply did not provide enough power for take-off. Catapults had been used to launch the flying bombs, and a similar method would be required to assist a pulse-jet powered *Miniaturjäger* in reaching a safe speed where the engine could take over, as it only functioned effectively at 240km/h or above. Other options that were considered included tow-planes and suspending the fighter parasite-like from a bomber, although clearly these extra elements in simply getting an aircraft airborne rendered any concept of mass attacks useless. No radio was to be installed so there was also the question of directing and co-ordinating effective interceptions. The Argus pulse-jet's performance tailed off with altitude and therefore the fighter would have been restricted to low-level and ground-attack sorties, defeating its primary role. The *Miniaturjägerprogramm* was therefore terminated in December 1944 before a winner could be selected. However, Junkers persisted with development of its own design, the EF.126 *Elli*. A wooden mock-up was apparently built but all work ceased in March 1945. Looking for a cheap, high-performance aircraft in the immediate post-war period, the Soviets obtained the plans and instructed their former Junkers design and production staff "volunteers" to resurrect the project in Russia. Five EF.126 prototypes were apparently built by March 1947 and four were test flown, three with Argus engines. However, by that stage, the Soviet Union were beginning to develop more

sophisticated jet projects of their own, so the *Elli* project was terminated.[1029]

A resurrected *Jägernotprogramm* competition, one that was initiated by the *Oberkommando der Luftwaffe* (OKL, or "High Command of the Air Force") in January 1945, sought to find a replacement for the He 162 *Volksjäger*, which itself had only been selected for production two months earlier. Unlike the *Volksjäger* and *Miniaturjäger* specifications, however, this would be a relatively sophisticated design, capable of high-altitude interceptions in anticipation of the four-engined Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber being introduced into service over Europe. The aircraft was to be powered by a single HeS 011 turbojet, which at that time had yet to progress beyond the prototype stage, and the onboard fuel load would give an endurance of at least thirty minutes. At least five companies submitted entries, and the Junker EF.128 design won the competition in February 1945.[1030] Broadly similar to the rival Blohm und Voss P.212, it was a tail-less aircraft, the tail fins being moved to the trailing edges of the wings. However, with less than three months to go before the end of the war, only a wind-tunnel model and a mock-up fuselage of the EF.128 had been produced. Focke-Wulf carried on with work on their own design, the Ta 183 *Huckebein* (the name of a cartoon raven) and, just weeks before the final surrender, the company was given the go-ahead to produce mock-ups and plan for production. Some initial construction began on the first of sixteen planned prototypes, but of course there was no time left to complete these, let alone test fly them.[1031] The RLM had clearly realised the futility of their original decision to seek a pulse-jet powered solution, and returned to an advanced concept, although by the time the brand-new competition was announced, it was far too late to affect the course of the war.

There are no references to *Kugelblitz* or anything like it in the various "crash programmes" to select a new fighter for the *Luftwaffe* at the end of 1944 and beginning of 1945, plus the various missile projects undergoing testing at that time. Whilst this cannot constitute proof of the non-existence of such a device, it is sufficient evidence

that the Germans were directing their efforts towards more conventional technology, and, in the case of the *Miniaturjägerprogramm*, using simpler powerplants. Development work on most jet and missile projects had been officially curtailed in February 1945 under *SS-Obergruppenführer Dr.-Ing.* Kammler's orders, to concentrate on the production of parts for aircraft designs that were tried and tested.

Looking at his claims regarding *Kugelblitz's* capabilities, it is clear that Vesco believed or intended it to be viewed as a development of *Feuerball*. His claims about "reactive armour" (not to be confused with material fitted to modern-day main battle tanks), and radio-control links have already been discussed in the chapter about *Feuerball*, as has the development of a television guidance system for anti-ship missiles, but the other elements he included need to be examined further. Gyroscopic stabilisation would have been possible as such systems had already been developed for the *Aggregat* ("Aggregate") series of German missiles which began with the A1 in 1933 and ended with the A4b in 1944, the latter essentially a "winged" V-2 rocket.[1032] Plans to build others, from the A6 test rocket through to the multi-stage, orbital-capable A12, were never realised, whilst the A5 test missile was developed prior to the A4 (the official name for the V-2). The two gyroscopes installed in the A4, which controlled not only the initial launch but in-flight and roll stabilisation, were linked to an accelerometer, which fed details about the rocket's speed into a mechanical computer, enabling the liquid-fuelled motor to be shut down when the missile reached a certain velocity. With no aerodynamical control surfaces, *Kugelblitz* would have also benefitted from a similar system that kept its attitude and roll within the ground operator's ability to control the weapon effectively.

Vesco's mention of "synthetic firedamp" as a weapon is intriguing, if not a little far-fetched. Firedamp is a term used to describe flammable gases found in coal mines. Methane that is trapped in pockets inside otherwise bituminous coal deposits and in the surrounding strata. When released by pick, shovel or other cutting

equipment, the gas can explode, especially if the concentration is around ten per cent when it is mixed with coal dust. Firedamp was not a new discovery in the 1940s, as it had been recognised as early as 1677.[1033] However, the notion of producing a gas mixed with coal dust that would intentionally create explosions was something else entirely. In *Intercept*, Vesco mentions that Italian scientists were working on combustible liquid gases at Riva del Garda in northern Italy on behalf of the *Luftfahrtforschungsanstalt Wien* in connection with *"liquified gas anti-aircraft rocket bombs."*[1034]

According to the author, these weapons, possible forerunners of the powerful modern-day thermobaric bombs, with "fuel air explosive" being the best known, were believed to employ pulverised coal dust or liquid gas such as ethylene, which, when ignited at altitude, would form a fiery explosion that was capable of downing multiple bombers at once. He also mentions research into synthetic firedamp as a possible substitute, again based on work done by Italian scientists and presumably a by-product of studies into combustible liquid gases.[1035] Of course, the evidence required to back up these statements is omitted. No independent corroboration of Vesco's claims in respect of Italian research into synthetic firedamp, or by any other country, appears to exist. However, German scientists had discovered how to successfully convert coal to synthetic fuel in 1913 and during WW2, the country's main supplies of high-grade aviation fuel, synthetic oil, and synthetic rubber were all produced via the same process.[1036] This was strategically important for the Germans as imported supplies of oil dried up after the outbreak of war.

One British scientist who would have been in a position to learn about German attempts to produce synthetic firedamp weapons was R. V. Jones, and in his 1978 book *Most Secret War*, he does discuss something called "*Flak* Gas". However, Renato Vesco's theories were not redeemed. Jones stated that a German communication was received via Ultra (deciphered copies of messages sent via Engima machines), one which included reference to *"FLAK GAS".* He had come across earlier stories of anti-aircraft shells that were

filled with a gas that could apparently paralyse aircraft engines, although he believed it to be somewhat improbable. However, the message actually referred to a *Flak Geräte Ausbau Stelle* ("anti-aircraft equipment depot").[1037] It was a simple error in interpretation.

There is, however, a tantalising paragraph in Vesco's sub-section on "Synthetic Firedamp", one that reminded me of the report made by the 384th BG on the raid to Stuttgart on 6th September 1943 when crews saw clouds of small "silver discs". Discussing the work allegedly carried out by a pool of aeronautical researchers brought together to develop such gases, Vesco observed that:

"…artificial firedamp immediately proved to be the ideal explosive for the little blower cannon that fired deadly gusts of gas – the 'little bluish clouds' released by the strange circular fighter plane against the unfortunate four-engined Liberators flying in close formation."[1038]

Whilst not entirely the same as the September 1943 report, it sounded equally as strange. Clouds of little disks and now a blower cannon firing deadly gusts of gas? What was a "blower cannon", and how did it fit into the so-called *Kugelblitz* project? Notable amongst those who Vesco mentions as being involved in the research into liquified gas weaponry was Dr Mario Zippermeyer, an Austrian scientist whose name crops up in connection with an even more fanciful Nazi secret weapon, the *Windkanone* ("Wind Cannon").[1039] Although apparently based on solid research, it appears to be reminiscent of the hopeless 1930s search for a so-called "death ray", something which would not have looked out of place in one of the American pulp science-fiction magazines of the time. Zippermeyer and his team were just further financial and material drains on the *Reich's* resources at a time when more conventional research may have reaped larger dividends for the war effort. The *Windkanone*, if it had been ever deployed operationally, would have featured a compressed column of air which was ejected upwards by the ignition

of a hydrogen and oxygen mixture. Although testing proved it could damage plywood sheets at distances of around 200m, it would only ever have been able to knock down low-flying aircraft. However, the weapon was totally impractical due to the size of the projector "cannon" needed. The upward-angled barrel itself was 50m long and the whole device was not exactly portable nor easily traversable. A single projector was apparently deployed for the anti-aircraft defence of a bridge over the River Elbe in 1945 but there are no records of the weapon actually being used.[1040] Vesco's mention of a *"multiple-batteried blower cannon"* sounds lethal in print, but in practice it could never have been reduced down to a size that would fit inside his *"armoured tortoise shell"*, in addition to the other equipment it supposedly contained.[1041] Given the author's predilection with combustible liquid gases, it is hard to work out what else this "blower cannon" could have referred to.

It is also difficult to make sense of Vesco's statement about the mystery *Kugelblitz* powerplant that made use of "*a gelatinous organic metallic hyper-combustible* [that] *was combined with the total reaction turbine."*[1042] Reaction turbines themselves were not a new concept. Germany had developed the world's first axial-compressor turbojet engine that was put into production. This was the Junkers 109-004, the first example of which was tested in 1940. Further development led to the engine being accepted for use in later aircraft designs such as the Me 262, with a prototype of this jet fighter flying with pre-production 109-004As in July 1942. These initial engines used scarce raw materials such as cobalt and molybdenum in amounts which could not be sustained when the design was put into large-scale production. As such, the 004B engine was quickly re-designed to use aluminium-coated mild steel in its construction, plus an alloy comprising chromium, iron, and manganese for the turbine blades. Production examples were fitted to aircraft as early as 1943. [1043]

Vesco's inclusion of a "total reaction turbine" suggests that scientists supposedly working on *Kugelblitz* were trying to build an engine which was beyond German capabilities at the time. However,

it was much more likely that the author had come up with an engine based on a flawed concept. To explain this, a reaction turbine in an aircraft powerplant application needs to be examined, together with the “utilisation factor” for a turbojet engine.

In a reaction turbine such as the Junkers 109-004B fitted to the Me 262, air flowed into the engine between the intake’s nose diverter cone and the outer casing. It then passed alternate circular sets of fixed and moving blades (“rotors”) that were fitted inside the engine casing. Pressure forced the sets to align and essentially act as a series of nozzles, compressing the air before it reached the next chamber. The alignment, known as an axial flow, gave rise to the designation of this type of jet engine. The airflow pushed the angled blades on the moving rotors around, at the same time turning the long central shaft that the blade rotors were attached to, the latter being linked to a turbine located at the rear of the engine, just forward of the exhaust. The compressed air entered the engine and was mixed with a spray of *“Einlauf J2”*, a synthetic fuel derived from coal, before being burned in the combustion section.[1044] Hot exhaust gases provided forward thrust and also turned the turbine which drove the sets of fixed blade rotors in the compressor. For ground starting, a small petrol-driven motor fitted in the intake nose diverter cone had to be employed to spin the turbine up.[1045] This was the world’s first auxiliary power unit, a common feature on modern jet and turboprop airliners. Whilst on the ground, the pilot also had to increase the engine rpm gradually, as extra fuel sprayed into the combustion chamber without an accompanying cooling airflow created a build-up of heat. Too much heat softened the rotors to the point where they failed more quickly.[1046] Even so, in the hands of skilled pilots, the maximum useful life of a Junkers 109-004B engine was only around 25 hours, and barely half that if they were not careful with the throttle controls.

Essentially, a turbojet’s utilisation factor was the ratio of the time that it was in use to the total time it could be in use. This ratio is often expressed in terms of time so that it becomes the amount of energy used, divided by the maximum possible that can be used. However,

a 100% or total reaction turbine becomes impractical because of the high rotor speed that is required to achieve a decent utilisation factor. In essence, the rotors have to do more work in terms of the contribution made to the overall effort. In the case of the Me 262's engines, they had originally been designed to run at around 9000 rpm. Resonances in the blades were found at that speed and the rpm had to be decreased to eliminate them. It would have required a much higher rpm figure than that used by the Junkers 109-004s fitted to operational Me 262s to achieve a "total reaction turbine" along the lines of what Vesco was proposing for *Kugelblitz*. The competing BMW 109-003 turbojet, a lighter and far more powerful design with a correspondingly longer operating life, had a turbine which spun at over 9500 rpm.[1047] However, the BMW engine's development became a rather protracted affair, with endless delays caused by early poor performance figures and component failures. Production examples were not available until the end of 1944, when they were fitted to the first He 162 *Volksjäger* prototypes. The four-engined version of the Arado Ar 234 would have been fitted with BMW 003s but the war ended before comprehensive flight testing could be carried out. The only other axial-flow turbojet built in Germany during the war was the BMW 109-018, work on which began in 1940. With a design employing twelve pairs of fixed and moving rotors and a three-stage turbine (three more pairs of rotors), this much larger version of the BMW 003 encountered even more problems in its design and construction, so much so that only three engines were partially built before the project was officially terminated in late 1944.[1048] Work carried on as a private venture under a much lower priority and did not progress much further before Germany surrendered. After the war, the French SNECMA company used plans for the BMW 109-018 design as the basis for their Atar 8C engine, which ran at around 8400 rpm.

Since Vesco does not give any information on precisely which type of turbojet (or "total reaction turbine") that *Kugelblitz* employed, it is difficult to work out who designed or manufactured it. Both BMW and Junkers were clearly completely tied up with their own

respective projects, all of which represented early examples of jet engines, and anyone with even a modicum of expertise in that kind of propulsion would have been grabbed by the leading players. However, none of the wartime German jet engines could truly be considered as mature designs, and in the case of the 109-004B, ironically the most successful of them all in terms of operational applications, possessed an extremely short engine life. Yet the powerplant fitted to *Kugelblitz* was supposedly running at very high rotor speeds in order to achieve a 100% reaction ratio. Even if one is being charitable and setting the bar at around 95%, this would still have involved rpm figures well above what were achieved by German jet engine designers and technicians during WW2. Of course, as *Kugelblitz* was presumably a much smaller flying device than a Me 262 jet fighter, then the new engine design must have been smaller, and it may have been much easier to spin smaller turbine blades at faster speeds. However, a more compact engine, using smaller components, would have presented its designers with different but equally time-consuming engineering challenges. When all of the other equipment that Vesco suggests was shoehorned into the *Kugelblitz's* casing is considered, then the turbojet powering it must have been a lot smaller than those already in production. Theoretically, it may have been possible to design and construct a smaller jet powerplant using the axial-flow principles used in the BMW 109-003 and Junkers 109-004. The only trouble with this argument is that there is no record of any such engine ever being designed, let alone built or tested in Germany during WW2.

Kugelblitz also apparently combined the electrostatic weapon that was carried by *Feuerball* with something Vesco described as *"an analogous short-wave device manufactured by the Patent-Verwertungs Gesellschaft of Salzburg."*[1049] Translated, the organisation's name was the "Salzburg Patent Exploitation Society". Although details of the actual device are sketchy at best, the *Patents-Verwertungs Gesellschaft* was apparently responsible for at least one secret weapons project during the war, and it was known as *Kugelblitz*. However, this is not corroboration for Vesco's claims

as there is a more mundane explanation. It was the codename for a proximity fuse, one of several that were developed for the abortive *Rheintochter* surface-to-air missile system project.[1050]

Despite not furnishing his readers with even the smallest scrap of evidence to back up his claims about *Kugelblitz*, Vesco persisted with his view that the device had been built. If that was not enough, he also claimed that one had flown a single combat mission during the war but that it was destroyed afterwards. According to the relevant chapter in his book *Intercept*, the following occurred in 1945:

"After a single lucky wartime mission, the Kugelblitz was subsequently destroyed by technical detachments of retreating SS troops, and thanks to the instructions that had been given to the investigators of the T Force by the exceedingly strict British military censorship, nothing else has come out since then."[1051]

In addition, the author included an uncredited report which gave details of this *"single lucky wartime mission"*.

"The circular German fighter without wings or rudder suddenly overtook the four-engined Liberator, crossing its flight path at very high speed. When it passed in front of the formation, it gave off a number of little bluish clouds of smoke. A moment later, the American bombers mysteriously caught fire, exploding in the air, while the German 'rocket' had already disappeared over the horizon. This astonishing combat – if it can be called that – between the very latest type of interceptor and a group of Flying Fortresses that had detached themselves from the main group and were heading towards southern Bavaria took place within a matter of seconds in the sky over Württemberg. The date is unspecified, but it must have been around the end of March or the beginning of April 1945." [1052]

Vesco contradicts himself here, claiming that one or more B-24 Liberators were destroyed in this engagement, before going on to describe them as a group of B-17 Flying Fortresses that had

detached themselves from the main formation. However, the point is moot, as there are simply no records of such a combat or a significant loss of American bombers, either over that part of Bavaria or elsewhere, in March or April 1945. In addition, none of the monthly *flak* reports, which would have almost certainly carried news of aircraft being downed by a new type of remotely-piloted device, give no details of anything resembling *Kugelblitz* (or *Feuerball*) either. Vesco claimed that the account was included in a report written by a French diplomat living in Switzerland, possibly based on information received from an informer residing on the opposite (German) side of Lake Constance.

The report also apparently included sketchy details of *"methane anti-aircraft bombs"* which the *Luftwaffe* had supposedly used against another formation of B-17s, this time over the Lake Garda area of northern Italy.[1053] This, of course, tied in nicely with Vesco's claims regarding research into liquified gas weapons. This alleged report was apparently intercepted by Italian agents of the *Servizio Informazioni Difesa* ("Defence Intelligence Service").[1054] He stated that details ended up in the hands of intelligence agents following the advance of the British Eighth Army through Italy, so this presumably would have happened before the end of the war. Vesco also claimed that British intelligence staff and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, a forerunner of the CIA) obtained a report which mentioned the testing of a weapon that was believed to explain the loss of *"a dozen four-engined American planes during their flight into Germany from a British base."* This can only have referred to B-17s or B-24s from the Eighth Air Force. No evidence has ever been found to support the author's claims, and the only references to these engagements point to Vesco's book as a source. This alleged report mirrored the one listed above:

"A strange flying machine, hemispherical or at any rate circular in shape, attacked them at a fantastic speed, destroying them in a few seconds without using any guns."

From Vesco's own words, we might assume that only a single *Kugelblitz* was built, as he refers to one object, although he also describes it as "the first". Despite him calling it *"the last and perhaps also the most amazing of all the flying machines that the Germans constructed towards the end of the war"*, there are no details about when or where it was made, nor by whom. He suggests it appeared when *"Nazism was in its death throes"*[1055], which may suggest the final months of the war, from the end of the *Wacht am Rhein* and *Nordwind* offensives until the final surrender. Of course, this could have been as far back as August 1944, when the Germans suffered huge setbacks on both the Eastern and Western fronts. They had just lost the Battle of Normandy and were reeling under the huge offensive known as *Bagration*, which effectively decimated *Heersgruppe Mitte* ("Army Group Centre") in Byelorussia.[1056] From that point on, it was virtually inevitable that it would be a case of when, not if, Germany surrendered. Yet again, though, Vesco is sparing with details that can be checked. He omits any mention of the exact date or month when the "single lucky mission" took place, where it was actually launched from, and the names of anyone who took part in the design, constructing, testing or launching process. Vesco does however give a clue as to the rough launching location for *Kugelblitz*:

"A number of improvised airstrips were set up in the thick pine forests of the Schwäbischerwald and the Bubesheimerwald which used nearby stretches of hastily camouflaged highway as dangerous airstrips. It was from one of those improvised fields that the first Kugelblitz fighter took off on its fantastic flight."[1057]

The Germans certainly used sections of *autobahn* as temporary runways during the final months of WW2. Me 262 jet night-fighters operated from the Lübeck-Hamburg *autobahn* in April 1945[1058] and there was a section south-east of Munich that was also used by the *Luftwaffe*. However, since the author did not include an undercarriage as part of his description of *Kugelblitz*, the ball-shaped

“fighter”, one wonders why it would have needed a runway, improvised or permanent? Surely any cleared area with a hard surface would have sufficed for the launch of such a device.

Some record of *Kugelblitz* should have survived. If it had been given to the armed forces (it is not clear which branch of service would have had responsibility for it, although the SS would have been the prime candidate), then a special unit would have been established. This alone would have created some paperwork. Vesco claimed that at some stage after the flight, it *“was subsequently destroyed by technical detachments of retreating SS troops”.*[1059] Whilst many of the German forces retreating in the face of the Allied and Russian advances often comprised a hotch-potch of units, with occasionally *Luftwaffe* or naval troops included in the mix, they did not have assigned “technical detachments”, although rear echelon staff would occasionally have been mixed in with other units in any retreat. The teams tasked with demolitions would have been *Pionier* (“engineering”) troops, proficient in handling explosives. Even when specialist personnel were drafted in to destroy facilities or equipment, it was often beyond the capabilities of those ordered to carry out the deed. Hiding the evidence was not always easier said than done.

The Germans definitely had varying levels of success when it came to hiding or destroying the fruits of their labour just prior to the final surrender in May 1945. The sole Messerschmitt P.1101 jet fighter[1060], the world’s first aircraft to feature variable-sweep wings (although only moveable on the ground), was found to be almost complete when the Americans captured the company’s Oberammergau facility on 29th April 1945, although the airframe itself had been hidden in a nearby tunnel and a crude attempt had been made to destroy it.[1061] When the British arrived at Leck airfield in Schleswig-Holstein on 6th May 1945, they found dozens of completely intact He 162 *Volksjäger* jet fighters belonging to JG 1, which were simply lined up on the parking ramps, having ran out of fuel with which to conduct operations.[1062] Attempts had been made to destroy the first two prototypes of the Ju 287 test-bed aircraft,

which featured a novel forward-swept wing arrangement. They had all but been abandoned at Brandis near Leipzig in September 1944 when the project was shelved. Both were still present in April 1945 when American forces reached the area, but the Germans stationed at the base had deliberately damaged the airframes by way of small explosive charges laid in their fuselages.[1063]

Absolute destruction was however inflicted upon the first example of the huge six-engined Ju 390 long-range reconnaissance and transport aircraft. It was deliberately set on fire and completely burnt out at the Junkers test airfield at Dessau in 1945. Whilst this has never been contested, the same cannot be said about the Ju 390 V2 prototype, of which photographic evidence does actually exist. For years it was suggested that the aircraft was not completed. Stories persist about it being used in a long-range reconnaissance mission to within 12 miles of New York in mid-1944.[1064] The Nazi UFO legend also rears its head here, since rumours suggest it was flown to Argentina or Uruguay towards the end of the war with the *Glöcke* ("Bell") anti-gravity device onboard.[1065] I have also come across stories that link one of the Ju 390s to the German atomic bomb project.[1066] These involve rabbit holes that I am not prepared to head down at this time – at least not in this particular book. Whatever the truth was about atom bombs or anti-gravity devices, neither Ju 390 survived into captivity at the end of the war. In fact, these huge machines simply vanished off the face of the earth. Yet photographs of the two prototypes, logbook entries from Junkers test pilots and some design drawings survived, so there is plenty of proof that they actually existed. Despite this, Renato Vesco wanted his readership to believe that nothing survived of either *Feuerball* or *Kugelblitz*. There was not so much as a requisition order for material, manpower or facilities, orders securing testing sites, fuel or even simply paying staff to work on the projects. Even secret weapons left paper trails in their wake.

It was harder than it might seem to totally eradicate every single trace of a secret weapons project, even the smaller and obscure ones. Despite the Germans' best attempts to do so, at least some

evidence survived, whether it was whole or incomplete airframes, design notes, pilots' logs, or photographs. In most cases a combination of these items were found by those tasked with searching Germany and Austria for technology that could prove useful. The "spoils of war" were not divided up equally between the Allies and the Russians, nor even among the various countries that made up the Allied themselves. The Yalta Conference in February 1945 had already decided how Germany and Austria should be split up under post-war control and governance arrangements, and yet the fortunes of war dictated that these boundaries were somewhat fluid, at least for a short time after the surrender in May 1945. The Americans, British and Canadian armies ended up advancing into territory that was conceded to the Soviets just two months later under terms agreed at Yalta[1067], but that was valuable time in which their own survey teams could find as much new technology as possible and remove it from the Russian Zone. If they could not move it in time, the option existed to destroy facilities and machinery, but only after close examination and interrogation of remaining personnel. The so-called "Line of Contact" (the various points between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas where the Allied and Russian armies finally met) did not initially follow the plan for post-war Europe laid out at Yalta.[1068] Doing so would have meant various Allied units actually coming to a complete halt in mid-April, even when there were still sizeable German forces in front of them which could have been re-deployed against the Russians, prolonging the war.

Various teams searched the regions of Germany and Austria that had recently fallen under Allied control and did so throughout March and April 1945. Proposals to create a joint American-British "Target-Force" were made when the invasion of Europe was being planned in late 1943 and early 1944.[1069] By the time that Allied forces reached Germany in March 1945, "T-Force" teams had been attached to each of the major American and British army groups, with specific instructions to *"identify, secure, guard, and exploit valuable and special information, including documents, equipment and persons of value to the Allied armies."*[1070] Once T-Force units

had seized a factory, facility or business, investigators would be sent to examine machinery, interrogate staff and seize material. Individuals who had been identified as designers, engineers or technicians in secret weapons projects were located and questioned, sometimes removed from Germany against their will, so that the knowledge they had could be extracted. T-Force operated in tandem with another secret group known as the ALSOS Mission, which had been following close behind the advance of the Allied armies in Italy in 1943, looking for clues regarding the German atomic bomb programme.[1071] ALSOS operated in the wake of the Allied advance and was able to search various facilities connected with atomic research in Germany during 1945, carting off equipment, notes and plans together with various important scientists who had worked in that field.

Picking over the spoils in Germany and Austria was not purely an Allied affair. The Russians also had their own similar groups of specialists who looked across the former *Reich* for technology that could be exploited, and they also had their own version of the ALSOS Mission, which frantically searched the Soviet sector of Germany during late 1945 and 1946 for both personnel and material.[1072] Research into jet engines, aerodynamics and weapons technology was carried out in the Soviet sector in 1945 using German scientists and technicians who had worked on such projects during the war and had not been able to or wanted to leave the Russian-occupied zone. They assisted Russian specialists who were flown into Germany from research establishments throughout the Soviet Union.

However, by mid-1946, Stalin decided that the research being carried out in the Russian-occupied zone should be moved to the Soviet Union, where espionage and the risk of personnel leaving for the Allied zones would be virtually nil. There was also the worry that the knowledge and experience accumulated by these people might be lost if a new Soviet-sponsored German government became more economically powerful. Initially, persuasion was used rather than coercion, with promises of excellent housing, access to food

and clothing, plus in the case of the former V-2 rocket programme personnel in the Russian-occupied zone, a slight relaxation in the restrictions on travel across the Soviet Union. All of this was much more than the average Russian had, and more than could be reasonably looked forward to for several years in the bombed-out *Reich*. However, the numbers of people accepting such inducements was limited and therefore a more direct approach was required.

A huge round-up of former scientists, engineers and technicians was conducted on a single night, 22nd October 1946. Around 2,200 people, many of whom had worked on the V-2, were forcibly removed from their homes at gunpoint by troops from the *Ministerstvo Vnútrennikh Del* (MVD, or "Ministry of Internal Affairs", later to become the KGB). If their families were present, they were taken as well, in order to encourage co-operation. The MVD also had the task of seizing equipment and material from both the former Peenemünde and *Mittelwerk* rocket facilities, *Erprobungsstelle* Rechlin and a whole host of other sites such as the Carl Zeiss factories at Dresden and Jena. Plants were stripped of machines, plans and paperwork as everything that could be of value to the Soviet Union had to be removed.[1073] Suspicions that the Russians had resumed rocket testing activities at Peenemünde were dispelled in 1947, when the media were allowed to visit and confirmed it was devoid of any weaponry.

In total, around 6,000 people were transported to Russia, the former rocket project staff assisting Soviet attempts to copy the V-2, whilst those with aeronautics experience carried on construction and testing of several German jet and rocket-powered aircraft designs which had not been completed before the end of the war. In addition to the Junkers EF.126 *Elli* pulse-jet powered point-defence interceptor that had been designed for the *Miniaturjägerprogramm* contest, the DFS 346 V1 rocket-powered research aircraft was also developed in Russia. This unfinished first prototype was shipped to Russia and then completed in 1946, although for test flights a second example was built instead, being air-launched from a Tupolev Tu-4 *Bull* four-engined bomber, this being a direct copy of

the Boeing B-29 Stratofortress, several of which had force-landed in eastern Siberia during WW2.[1074] The first test flight of the DFS 346 V1 occurred in September 1948 but powered flights with a third aircraft did not occur until 1953, and the project was shelved shortly afterwards.[1075] The Russians had hoped it would be capable of breaking the sound barrier under the right conditions.

Vesco hinted that T-Force teams may have known about *Kugelblitz*, although he does not actually confirm this, nor give any specific details regarding what was found. He vaguely touches upon *"instructions that had been given to the investigators of the T Force by the exceedingly strict British military censorship"* but it is all too easy to make such statements when they are almost impossible to disprove.[1076] Vesco seemed to be suggesting that T-teams had discovered details relating to *Kugelblitz* but that this knowledge was suppressed by British military intelligence and has been so ever since. However, in specifying the Bubesheimer Wald and the Schwäbischer Wald, the author chose a couple of strange locations. The first is in Bavaria and the second just outside Stuttgart. Neither were in the British zone of operations or occupation, as French armies took Stuttgart, and the Americans overran the Bubesheimer Wald area. "British military censorship" would have had no authority in these areas. Schwäbischer Wald was located extremely close to Leipheim, which was a Messerschmitt factory airfield. Early prototypes of the Me 262 jet fighter were tested there, and production was carried out at the site until it was bombed in April 1944.[1077] Subsequent raids forced construction of the type to be moved into *Kuno I* in the nearby Bubesheimer Wald, the new site being one of the new *Waldwerke* ("forest factories").[1078] Could *Kuno* I, or a similar forest site just north-east of Stuttgart have been the place where the prototype *Kugelblitz* was constructed? No information or evidence has ever appeared to confirm its existence, let alone where it was built. If Vesco believed that the British T-Forces were responsible for finding whatever survived from the *Kugelblitz* project, then the Leipheim and Stuttgart areas did not fit into the puzzle. Why were their American technology-seeking

counterparts not also included, since it was more likely that they would stumble across any traces of the weapon in their own zone of operations? The locations fitted into Vesco's alleged reports of American bombers being destroyed over Bavaria but nothing else made any sense.

The question is whether details relating to *Kugelblitz* were spirited away by British intelligence officials, and if so, why has no-one ever come forward with information about the project in the seventy-six plus years since it supposedly existed? Wartime oaths of secrecy were definitely honoured, with arguably the greatest secret being *Ultra*, the intelligence gathering operation that resulted from breaking the secret German *Enigma* code. Almost no details were known until 1974 when F. W. Winterbotham's book *The Ultra Secret* was published.[1079] Whilst it was not without errors, the book proved that even the best-kept secrets eventually saw the light of day. The moral codes that former service and intelligence personnel lived under have been slowly eroded since the 1950s. Files on hitherto secret projects have been released into the public domain. Those who believe Vesco's stories of hi-tech German weaponry fitted with radical armament use secrecy as a reason why there remains a complete dearth of details on both *Feuerball* and *Kugelblitz*. The author himself alluded to this when he referred to the *"exceedingly strict British military censorship".* However, *Ultra* has been described as "the greatest secret of the war" – why were these somewhat obscure devices worthy of even greater protection?

If anyone wanted to find details of projects that were totally destroyed, with all the evidence relating to them being eradicated too, then they could only rely upon verbal accounts of people who were either connected to them directly or witnessed their testing. However, in the case of Vesco's *Feuerball* and *Kugelblitz*, we have no real eye-witness testimony. The design teams are not named nor are any personnel connected with testing or operational missions. No-one has been able to find so much as a receipt for materials or a request for testing facilities. Seventy-six years later, the possibility of a new account emerging from someone who was present at either

their design, construction, or testing, plus, in the case of *Kugelblitz*, their destruction, is now impossible. However, no witnesses came forward in the intervening years between 1945 and the publication of Vesco's *Intercept* either, whilst even the book (in its original form or English translation) failed to bring anyone's testimony out into the open.

Looking back to the flying discs for a moment, both Rudolf Schriever and Dr. Miethe had both offered the possibility that engineers working on such projects had been taken to Russia. Whilst personnel were transported to the Soviet Union to work on a number of weapons systems, most who survived returned to Germany in the early to mid-1950s, spending their last year or so in the Soviet Union in limbo lest any up-to-date knowledge of Russian developments be passed onto the West. Yet no confirmed reports of any Germans working on secret disc projects have ever come out of the Soviet Union, even after the fall of Communism when such matters could have been discussed much more freely. The only other possibility is that the specialists in flying disc technology were considered too valuable to let go by the Russian authorities and toiled away in remote establishments in secret until the end of their natural lives. Whilst possible, it sounds too convenient for those trying to push the Nazi UFO or German "Foo Fighter" narrative without any proof to back up their statements. Despite the complete lack of evidence to support his claims, Vesco was either totally convinced of his argument or trying to hoodwink his readership. However, his view of what pre-dated the UFO sightings in the 1950s and 1960s was at least very clear:

"Even if Ufologists do not know it or refuse to admit it, the Kugelblitz, older brother of the Feuerball antiradar device, is the second authentic antecedent of the present-day flying saucers and it is with them – and with the other German devices of the same family (spinning bombs, lenticular bombs, ramming fighters, and flying spheres) - that the true history or, if you like, the 'prehistory' of the UFO question begins."[1080]

This was quite a statement for someone who struggled to back up what he had claimed. An examination of the weapons that Vesco mentioned in the above summation should be considered, if only to discuss whether the author actually knew what he was talking about. As far as I am aware, spinning bombs, lenticular bombs and ramming fighters have never been put forward by the military or sceptics as explanations for the plethora of UFO sightings in either the wartime or post-war periods. Even after the end of the war in Europe, when details of German secret weapons projects emerged, none of these were suggested as possible candidates for the "Foo Fighters". Project Blue Book cases were explained away by celestial phenomenon, birds and "swamp gas"[1081], the standard explanations put forward by critics and officials who reported on such events.[1082]

Whilst Vesco's use of these terms in connection with UFO sightings clearly did not match what was being offered as post-war explanations, it would be unfair to say that he had simply made them up. Although I could not find anything related to "lenticular bombs", I have been aware of the other two for years. Although the damage done during Operation *Chastise* on the night of 16-17th May 1943 caused a short-lived inconvenience to the industrial facilities located in the Ruhr Valley, the "Dams Raid", as the RAF mission is far better known, gave Britain a huge propaganda boost. Using the so-called "bouncing bomb", eleven Lancasters bombers attacked the Möhne, Eder, Sorpe and Ennepe Dams. The first two were breached and the third slightly damaged during the raid, which saw the loss of eight of the aircraft.[1083] A book about the mission, titled *The Dam Busters*, was published in 1951 and a movie bearing the same name was released to popular acclaim in 1955. The "bouncing bomb" concept resulted from the identification of targets such as the *Kriegsmarine* battleship *Tirpitz*, berthed in a succession of northern Norwegian fjords, plus a series of large dams throughout the Ruhr Valley which generated hydro-electric power for the numerous factories and industrial plants located there. Vickers-Armstrong's assistant chief

designer, Barnes Wallis, came up with the idea of a bomb that could skip across the water, bypassing anti-torpedo nets and booms protecting the target. Once in contact with the side of a vessel or a dam, it would sink underwater and explode in the same fashion as a depth charge, using a “bubble pulse” effect to increase the detonation’s effectiveness.[1084] Two separate weapons were created, a large “bouncing bomb” to attack dams (“Upkeep”) and a smaller one for anti-shipping strikes (“Highball”). Both could be spun backwards whilst hanging in an aircraft’s bomb-bay. This provided the bombs with improved height and stability once they were dropped, and allowed them to bounce over the water, ensuring high levels of accuracy and success. “Upkeep” was not used in anger again following the “Dams Raid”, and “Highball” never saw operational service, due to the advent of “earthquake bombs” such as the 12,000lb “Tallboy” and 22,000lb “Grand Slam” weapons.

The Germans eventually came up with something similar to “Highball”. Unlike the British bomb however, *Kurt* (as the German “bouncing bomb” was codenamed) was designed to be dropped from high-performance fighter-bomber aircraft. Instead of being barrel-shaped, like “Upkeep”, *Kurt* was spherical and weighed around 385kg. Officially designated as the *Spezialbombe 800* (SB 800, or “Special Bomb 800”), it was also known as the *Prismen Rollbombe* (“Prism Roll Bomb”). Employed in trials initially with a twin-engined Me 410A *Hornisse* (“Hornet”) and then a Fw 190A, it was quickly discovered that after release, *Kurt* travelled at around the same speed as its carrier aircraft and would either bounce upwards, risking the aeroplane, or explode against the target as the pilot was flying overhead. There was also the matter of how close the bomb had to be released from its target. Its effective range was around 400m, bringing the launch aircraft much nearer to anti-aircraft defences. The designers therefore looked at different ways of propelling the bomb, much faster than the speed that the delivery aircraft could fly at, and which would also allow it to be launched at a safer distance.[1085]

The solution was the addition of a small solid-fuelled rocket, housed in a cylindrical section attached to the spherical bomb. Four

tail fins protruded sideways from the rear of this short “fuselage”, the latter also housing the rocket motor. Numerous small exhaust nozzles were arranged in a ring around the edge of the rear assembly. Initial tests at the *Erprobungsstelle* Travemünde marine testing range in the Baltic involved *Kurt* being dropped at around 20m above the water. Once the weapon had fallen away to a safe distance below the carrier aircraft, the small rocket motor ignited, propelling the bomb at high speed towards the sea. On impact with the surface, the rocket motor assembly broke off, leaving the weapon to skip across the water towards the target. Early trials with the rocket-assisted *Kurt* soon demonstrated that the weapon would easily deviate from its intended course if the small motor ignited as the device was yawing as it fell away from the aircraft. To solve this problem, a gyroscope was planned to be installed in a new housing between the bomb and the rocket motor assembly, lengthening the device by about a fifth.

Two *Kurt* bombs without rocket motors could be carried simultaneously by a single-engined Fw 190A on its centre-line weapons rack without comprising its ground clearance, although climbing away from the runway involved a shallower ascent than usual to prevent runway strikes. Film exists of two *Kurts* being dropped from an Fw 190A, but similar imagery of the rocket-assisted tests shows only involved single bombs being carried and released. [1086] Extensive testing was carried out over the Baltic ranges during 1944 but *Kurt* was still not ready for operational deployment when the project was cancelled in November 1944. Complete specimens of *Kurt*, obtained by Allied T-Force units after the end of the war, were taken to the United States for analysis. Despite the fact that both Allied and German examples of “spinning bombs” did exist and, in the case of “Upkeep”, were used operationally, it is almost certain that these weapons (or similar devices which have yet to be reported) could not have been the origin of any of the “Foo Fighter” reports. Their launch points were far too low, and they were not illuminated. In the case of *Kurt*, there was a brief glare from the rocket exhaust, but its duration was only a couple of seconds prior to

hitting the water and being extinguished. I have yet to determine if anything else in the German arsenal could fit the description of a “spinning bomb”.

Vesco also stated that the spate of post-war UFO reports could have been attributed to wartime designs for “ramming fighters”. There had been sporadic instances where fighter pilots, having exhausted their limited supply of cannon shells and machine-gun rounds, chose to ram an enemy aircraft in an attempt to bring it down. This was an extremely hazardous manoeuvre, one where the outcome in terms of survival, serious injury or death could not be predicted. Following the German invasion in June 1941, Soviet pilots who were often flying inferior machines to those operated by the *Luftwaffe* at the time, chose to carry out *Taran* (“Ram”) attacks as a final desperate method of downing the enemy. It is believed that standing orders developed to allow fighter pilots to perform *Taran* attacks providing they were still over Russian-held territory, as this ruled out the possibility of capture.[1087] As the war progressed, Soviet aircraft improved in terms of performance figures and weaponry carried, diminishing the need for pilots to consider heroic last-ditch actions.

In the early part of the war, when victories were plentiful, *Luftwaffe* pilots did not feel the need to potentially sacrifice themselves in ramming attacks. Whilst there were individual incidents in the skies above Germany, particularly as the number and effectiveness of American bomber raids over the *Reich* increased in 1944, no official sanction for such actions existed. Indeed, if anything, the concept of self-sacrifice was shied away from in the *Wehrmacht*. Hitler himself did not approve of it, believing it was something unbefitting the German character, and this was a view shared by most senior commanders. However, as the war entered its final stages, this position changed in a limited way. In March 1945, a proposal to inflict huge losses on enemy daylight bomber formations was put forward, the idea being to launch hundreds of Messerschmitt Bf 109 and Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighters, stripped down to a single machine-gun each to increase

performance. Swamping the escorts, they would attack the “heavies” and then ram any survivors once their extremely limited supply of ammunition was exhausted. Official approval was eventually given, but instead of the 2,000 aircraft that were envisaged for the first mission, only 180 Bf 109s took off on 7th April 1945 due to the perilous state of the *Luftwaffe* at that stage of the conflict. Their low numbers proved incapable of overwhelming the enemy’s escorts and less than twenty American bombers were downed or damaged. The special *Luftwaffe* unit set up for the ramming attack, designated *Sonderkommando Elbe*, did not carry out a second mission.[1088]

Whilst officialdom poohpoohed ramming attacks, it did not stop German aircraft designers from drawing up plans for machines capable of such missions. At least two designs are known, although there may have been others that were shelved at an early stage. Both emerged in the autumn of 1944 when it was becoming clear that Germany was not going to be able to stop the Allies and Russians from eventually overcoming its defences. The first was a patent filed by Gotha in October 1944, the company being better known for its Go 145 biplane trainer and Go 242 assault glider. Two basic versions of a Gotha “Rammer” existed, although they both employed the same premise, whereby the cockpit section would break off or be ejected at the moment of impact. According to Gotha documentation that accompanied the proposal, the following was required:

“To assure that in both of these cases the cockpit breaks away from the aircraft, it is recommended for the front of the cockpit to be designed as an armoured cone. Such an aircraft will easily bore through the assaulted aircraft with its cone. The fuselage of the attacking aircraft will remain stuck in the assaulted aircraft, whereas the cockpit will detach itself like a projectile from the attacking aircraft.”

Serious thought had been given as to how the pilot would survive such a ramming attack:

"The cockpit can also be attached outside the main fuselage, and the nose to be fitted with an explosive device which, at the moment of impact, bursts a hole in the assaulted aircraft, for the detachable cockpit to slide through. This explosive device can also be detonated at will."

Drawings for the other version showed a cockpit "pod" fitted above the forward fuselage, the former sporting a probe with an explosive charge attached to its tip. On impact, the detonation was supposed to blow a large enough hole in the enemy bomber's fuselage for this "pod" to pass through safely. It is unclear what engine was envisaged. The surviving drawings indicate that some sort of exhaust was located in the tailplane but there were no air intakes, suggesting it would have been rocket powered.[1089]

The Gotha designs were not received favourably as no contracts were awarded for further design and development, let alone production. A similar fate awaited the other proposal which was submitted a month later. Luftschiffbau Zeppelin, more famous for its airships of WW1 and the inter-war years, accepted contracts to manufacture components for the V-2 and build *Würzburg-Riese* radar reflector dishes. Although its main factories in Friedrichshafen had already been largely destroyed by Allied raids in June 1943 and July 1944, the company was still keen to contribute to the war effort. A proposal for a *Rammjäger* ("Ramming Fighter") was submitted to the RLM in November 1944. It was a small aircraft fitted with straight wings and a nose-cone section housing 14 R4M *Orkan* ("Hurricane") 55mm air-to-air rockets. The leading edges of both wings were covered in steel sheet to allow the aircraft to survive a ramming attack intact. An 80mm thick windscreen offered some protection to the pilot, along with 28mm armour plating around the cockpit. Design calculations suggested that the Zeppelin *Rammjäger* would lose only a small amount of airspeed and stability after it had sliced through the tail section of a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress.[1090]

The project did not progress beyond the design stage and was shelved by the end of 1944. Some sources state that a production contract was issued in January 1945 for sixteen prototypes, but it could not be fulfilled because the factory was destroyed in a bombing raid shortly afterwards. However, the attack in July 1943 had severely damaged the factory at Friedrichshafen, forcing component manufacture to be moved out of the city. The daylight raid in July 1944 effectively reduced it to rubble and by early 1945 the company itself had practically ceased to exist. It is possible that another facility elsewhere had been earmarked for *Rammjäger* production, but this is not clear.[1091] Most aviation reference works suggest that no examples were built.[1092] What is clear is that these projects could not have been the origin of the "Foo Fighter" reports, although as we will discover in the following chapter, another largely unknown German rocket-propelled design was proposed by Allied intelligence as being the source. However, Vesco's claims simply do not make sense here.

The inspiration for the Italian's claims may well stem from an edition of the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale dell'Emilia,* printed only a few weeks after Giuseppe Belluzzo's original article. A former station master, Lino Saglioni, had apparently sent a letter to the newspaper confirming the Professor's statements, although how he was able to verify what had been published is unclear. Saglioni claimed he had been told in 1942 that Italian scientists had observed *"random manifestations of physical phenomena"* whilst experimenting with radical new turbines, which paved the road for the development of a new aircraft known as the "flying sphere". According to the former station master, the Italians had passed the plans to the Germans, who established a research facility not far from the heavy water plant at the Vermork power station at Telemark in Norway. The device that was allegedly developed there was described as a *"sphere flattened at its poles"*, operated by an *"acoustic radio-control system".* Saglioni claimed that both the Americans and the Russians had perfected the weapon after the war and that these devices were what people around the world were mistaking for "flying saucers".[1093] An

unknown spherical weapon powered by a technologically-advanced turbo-jet engine seemed to be what Renato Vesco was advocating nearly twenty years later. He wrote *Intercept* in the early 1950s and he could have read the report in *Il Giornale dell'Emilia*.

It is likely that further articles drew the Italian author's attention and were used to bolster his story about radical new German secret weapons. Although Vesco's *Intercept* is well-known among those arguing a terrestrial and German explanation for the "Foo Fighters", the author's subsequent two books are hardly ever quoted, although this may be because they were only published in Italian. *I velivoli del mistero* ("Mystery Aircraft") references *Feuerball* and *Kugelblitz* only briefly, in a chapter dealing with an alleged German synthetic "coal concentrate" fuel which was capable of providing huge amounts of power compared with gasoline or diesel. Vesco's sources were always conspicuous by their absence when it came to his outlandish claims, although in this case it appears that he was drawing upon someone else's words and adapting them to fit his own narrative.

In mid-April 1950, an Italian newspaper reported a claim made by one Hans Kosinski, who Vesco stated had been a *Hauptmann* ("Captain"), serving with the RLM during the last two years of the war.[1094] According to this alleged former *Luftwaffe* officer, the German technical services had developed this powerful synthetic fuel. Vesco repeated Kosinski's comments in *I velivoli del mistero*:

"The fuel extracted from a ton of this substance did not exceed a quarter of a litre and yet corresponded to approximately fifty litres of gasoline."[1095]

In addition to this new super-fuel, a revolutionary metal alloy had allegedly been invented. This new alloy was apparently light yet remained capable of withstanding extremely high temperatures. Kosinski also claimed that a circular-shaped craft had been built using the radical lightweight alloy and fitted with an engine powered by the new high-performance fuel. According to the former *Luftwaffe* officer and alleged RLM staff member, the "aircraft" made its first

flight in 1944, demonstrating an exceptional rate of climb, one that was described as supersonic. Pressed for more details of this wonder-weapon, Kosinski told reporters that only five examples were built before Adolf Hitler himself intervened, ordering that they were to be hidden away before the Allies captured them. At some stage, the devices were to be disassembled, then transported to secret Nazi bases located elsewhere in the world.[1096] The former *Hauptmann* did not give too much away about the exact locations of these bases, although Queen Maud Land in Antarctica and "the northern seas" were mentioned in separate newspapers. This was possibly the first time that claims had been made about secret bases in the Antarctic and may well have been the root of subsequent stories about top Nazi officials and scientists relocating to "Base 211", where a fleet of flying saucer shaped aircraft allegedly "saw off" the US Navy's task force that participated in Operation *Highjump* which began in August 1946 and ended just six months later.

Detailed discussion of the alleged links between "Highjump" and Nazi UFOs are beyond the scope of this book, but it is probable that Vesco used the claims about this "coal concentrate" super-fuel when he dreamt up the idea of *Feuerball* and *Kugelblitz.* He quoted Kosinski's comments about the new lightweight alloy that could withstand high temperatures, tying this in with his new weapons – and possibly even disc-shaped aircraft:

"The discovery of this chemical compound made it possible at a later time to build an aircraft that shared the technical characteristics of the airplane and the helicopter. However, its first test gave absolutely negative results, as the metal alloy of the engine could not withstand the astounding temperature developed by the new fuel. More years of work were needed to overcome the serious inconvenience and only in 1944 was an alloy capable of resisting the enormous heat developed by the 'coal concentrate' created. Thus a circular-shaped aircraft could finally rise into the air, reaching speeds much higher than those of all other types in existence. A feature that fundamentally distinguished the new craft from other aircraft was its

particular ability to rise in a straight line within a few seconds, putting any follower in serious difficulty."

Readers will remember that Vesco's alleged secret weapons could shoot upwards at a high rate of speed if fired upon. He was convinced that these craft existed, but Kosinski did not name them, so were they examples of Vesco's *Feuerball* or *Kugelblitz*, or something else entirely but somehow related? If the author had any doubts about the statements *Hauptmann* Kosinski made back in April 1950, he did not confirm them in writing, embellishing the story that had already been told:

"Given the success of the tests, the German Headquarters then ordered the construction of a first series of five of these aircraft and proposed to use them as reconnaissance aircraft but, once the construction was completed, Hitler did not recommend their immediate use, arguing that, being numerically too much scarce, they could have been better served later for other purposes." [1097]

Vesco also included Kosinski's claims about just where the disassembled "saucers" had ended up, but then ended up suggesting that it was simply a "fictional hypothesis". This was quite a statement, given the author's own flight of fancy regarding two hitherto unknown German secret weapons.

Where did Renato Vesco obtain his details from? He claimed that he had perused the CIOS files whilst working for the Italian government after the war. He certainly quotes from them when discussing topics that are not contentious. From the subjects he discusses, Vesco seems to have had access to documents that would have been denied to an ordinary civilian in the early 1950s.

There is a file in the CIOS collection listing damage sustained to one of the engines of a Lockheed F-5E Lightning (the photo-reconnaissance version of the P-38) belonging to the 13th RS. The damage was said to have occurred over its target on 22nd January 1945. The aircraft managed to return to base on one engine, and

after an investigation, it turned out that all of the intake and exhaust spark plugs on the affected powerplant's right bank had been fouled. [1098] No link is suggested between the damage and a suspected German secret weapon deployed against the Lighting, and it appears that this report may have been misfiled among the archived CIOS files.

Was this the impetus for Vesco's claims? Did he take this report and construct an elaborate story about secret German research around a simple clerical error? We will probably never know the reasons why he tried to fool everyone with stories of two false devices.

Chapter 15:
A Snake in the Grass

The defense against bombers was by use of planes which American fighters called 'foo fighters'…

- *The Day* newspaper, Connecticut, 20th August 1945.

There is one more statement Vesco made which needs further scrutiny. It also helps identify the point in time when the *"single lucky wartime mission"* is supposed to have been carried out. He devotes a whole paragraph of his sub-chapter on *Kugelblitz* to *Unternehmen Bodenplatte* ("Operation Baseplate"), the *Luftwaffe's* abortive attempt to destroy the Allied air forces on the ground in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands on New Year's Day 1945. At least 875 fighter and fighter-bomber aircraft took off to carry out attacks on Allied aerodromes. 280 aircraft were lost, and with them 143 pilots killed or missing, plus a further 70 captured. The numbers of Allied machines destroyed on the ground has never been accurately measured, although it was estimated to be about 300, with a further fifteen shot down in aerial combat. Allied losses were replaced within a number of days.

The same could not be said for the Germans. *Bodenplatte* effectively wiped out what remaining capability the *Luftwaffe* had as an effective force, both in attack and defence, and the mission also used most of the dwindling fuel supplies that had been husbanded for future operations. Its own airfields were coming under sustained air attack, to the point at which the Me 262 jet fighters had to have a virtual "umbrella" of piston-engined Fw 190D fighters from a sister unit flying overhead cover to protect them during take-offs and landings where they were most vulnerable. Runways, hangars, and maintenance facilities were systematically being destroyed across the *Reich* or patrolled constantly by Allied fighters waiting to pounce on *Lutftwaffe* aircraft simply trying to get airborne or land safely. One

solution was to effectively abandon the fixed airfields in favour of improved airstrips on straight stretches of *autobahn*. Another was to develop a point-defence interceptor, this time one which was launched vertically so there was no need for a runway. Whilst it did not feature an "electrostatic firing device" similar to what Vesco proposed for *Kugelblitz*, it seemed to be the closest thing that the Germans developed during WW2 in terms of the author's description, and what is more, the whole project had been documented. It was the *Natter* rocket-propelled interceptor.[1099]

Whole books have been written on the subject of *Wunderwaffen* and yet a single volume would never be enough to cover them in their entirety. Some, like *Natter*, display the ingenuity and sheer desperation that was involved in some of the German designs towards the end of the war, and this one was actually referred to by Vesco in *Intercept*.[1100] However, there are problems with the author's statements regarding this project too, and there are "Foo Fighter" and flying disc-related reasons for including mention of it here, all of which should become clear in due course.

The Bachem Ba 349 *Natter* ("Adder", a type of poisonous grass snake), originally designated as the BP.20, was a small rocket-powered, vertical take-off recyclable point-defence interceptor. Launched from a steel-framed tower, it was powered by solid-fuel booster rockets and a Walter liquid-fuelled rocket motor. The machine displayed a truly fantastic rate of climb, with an altitude of 12000m being reached just a minute after take-off. The boosters were jettisoned shortly after reaching maximum climbing speed. 24 Henschel Hs 297 *Föhn* solid-fuel rockets were the *Natter's* only armament, fitted into a hexagonal launcher in the aircraft's nose. After a successful attack on the bomber stream had been carried out using the unguided missiles and the main rocket motor's fuel was exhausted, the fuselage split into two halves. The rear section, including the Walter powerplant, descended to earth by means of a parachute, whilst the pilot would bail out of the cockpit section using his own 'chute. The remainder of the machine was written off, but

being made of plywood over wooden ribs, frames, and spars, it could easily be replaced.

By March 1945, eight powered but unmanned test vehicles had been launched. The only known manned flight occurred on 1st March 1945 and ended with the death of the *Luftwaffe* test pilot, Lothar Sieber, when the cockpit canopy broke loose after take-off, rendering him unconscious. Under an emergency plan known as *Krokus* ("Crocus"), a few operational *Natters* were erected on towers at a site near Stuttgart in April 1945 to await suitable targets, but the site had to be hurriedly abandoned due to the arrival of American forces before any bomber formations overflew the area. The handful of interceptors were returned to the Bachem factory at Waldsee and on the following morning they were destroyed to avoid them falling into enemy hands. The SS became extremely interested in the project, so much so that they provided around 120 convalescing soldiers with mechanical experience for use as engineering staff once construction of the first examples began, and in March 1945 they ordered 150 machines for their own use, intended for use by their fledgling air arm. This order was, of course, a totally unrealistic request at that stage of the war.

In his chapter *Mysterious Night Lights over the Rhineland* and under the heading *S.S. Dominance*, Vesco includes a paragraph about construction of the Bachem Ba 349 *Natter* and how the SS ordered aircraft on top of an existing *Luftwaffe* request. Whilst this is true, the author also includes a footnote to this at the end of the chapter, confirming the death of the test pilot as mentioned above but also providing details about another flight:

"Because of an aerodynamic defect, the first test flight of the Natter ended in a disaster that brought about the death of the pilot, Lothar Sieber, but about a month later over Hanover on March 29, 1945, during the only attack made with the Natter craft, officially called the Bachem BP.20, Sergeant Ernest Hemmer piloted one of the first pre-production models against a formation of four-engined Liberators and succeeded in downing two and damaging a third."[1101]

This is quite a claim, yet no evidence has emerged since the publication of *Intercept* that corroborates Vesco's statement. Who was Ernest Hemmer and why does the successful attack never appear in any histories written about the Ba 349 *Natter*?

In 2006, possibly the most authoritative book published on the *Natter* appeared, namely *Projekt Natter: Last of the Wonder Weapons*. It was based on ten years' worth of research into the project and is packed with photos and witness testimony, many of whom were directly connected with the development and testing programme. The book is a prime example of how documentation for an obscure German secret weapons project was still available, more than sixty years after it was developed. Only 36 *Natters* were built, including eight which only flew as gliders in the early testing stages of the project.[1102] Names are provided for the Bachem test pilots, but the small number of *Luftwaffe* pilots intended to fly as part of Operation *Krokus*, the planned large-scale mission against enemy bombers, remain unidentified. The latter group numbered eight at most; apparently all of them were very experienced aviators and most were highly decorated.[1103] It is therefore unlikely that someone of *Feldwebel* ("Sergeant") rank would have been included in such a grouping, as experienced and decorated pilots were quickly promoted, at least as far as junior officer status.

Furthermore, there is no record of anyone by the name of Hemmer, as a pilot or otherwise, in connection with the Ba 349 *Natter* project. In addition, none of the US Eighth Air Force B-24 Liberator units mention losses due to a *Natter* or anything resembling one on 29th March 1945. The extreme speed and rate of climb of one of these machines would have definitely been recorded by surviving aircraft in the bomber formation. Vesco does not give the reader any idea about where his information on this supposed operational *Natter* mission came from. From more reliable sources, it is clear that whilst such sorties were planned and machines were even set up on the launchers, these flights never occurred.[1104] The only manned launch recorded by Erich Bachem, chief designer of

the project, was the unsuccessful one on 1st March 1945.[1105] As he was closely involved with every aspect of the project, even including the abortive *Krokus* operation, one would think he would have been aware of a successful manned mission. In any case, no Natters were deployed in the Hanover area, and the type could not have flown there from Stuttgart.

Funnily enough, the *Natter* was given as the explanation of the "Foo Fighter" reports by at least one American publication not long after the end of the war in Europe. The 20th August 1945 edition of *The Day* newspaper based in New London, Connecticut, included a story titled "New German Weapons Revealed". It confidently proclaimed that the Bachem project was to blame for sightings of the phenomenon:

"The defense against bombers was by use of planes which American fighters called 'foo fighters'. These were tiny jet-propelled craft which were 'buttoned' to the base of steel poles and shot vertically into the air at the tremendous speed of rockets. Pilots inside guided the planes at 550 miles per hour, intercepting bomber formations with sprays of rocket shells fired from the noses of the craft. After the pilot had used his two minutes of fuel, he pulled a level and was catapulted out to float to safety by parachute. Simultaneously, the tail of the plane dropped off, releasing another parachute which brought the craft gently to earth where the Germans could salvage the jet units. Chains of stations for these jet craft were stationed all along the bombers' routes."[1106]

Part of this description was certainly correct, but the "chain of stations" never materialised, and the *Natter* certainly was not the source of the "Foo Fighter" reports. The first and only manned launch was in March 1945 and testing was confined to one small area in the middle of the military training area at Stettin am kalten Markt, 60 km south of Stuttgart. Test launches of the unmanned *Natter* prototypes were not carried out at night, as it would have been impossible to accurately record their progress. In any case, the

mission profile called for attacks against American day bombers, so there was no need for nocturnal launching. The Ba 349 also appeared in a post-war report concerning the “Foo Fighters”, although we will look at that in the last chapter.

The Bachem project also provides a tenuous link between Vesco and a personality in the flying disc story. An alleged acquaintance of Professor Belluzzo, one Alberto Fenoglio, drew sketches of his friend’s alleged flying disc design for a 1951 Italian publication. He claimed that Messerschmitt had designed the *Krache*, a pilotless interceptor missile during WW2. Vesco briefly mentions this machine, stating it was fitted with eight 55mm R4M *Orkan* unguided missiles plus a single 30mm MG213 cannon.[1107] Looking at the specifications Fenoglio listed for this device, plus a drawing he included, *Krache* appears to have used the overall shape of the aborted *Enzian* radio-controlled surface-to-air missile. This was designed and tested by Messerschmitt between 1943 and 1944, before all work was stopped on the project due to issues with rocket engines and proximity fuses, plus difficulties in guiding the missile to its target.[1108] In addition, Fenoglio’s notes regarding *Krache’s* mission profile seem to mirror the *Natter’s* proposed attack against enemy bombers. Given the complete lack of supporting documentation regarding this weapon, either in the article or emerging since then, it is very unlikely that it ever existed as a design, let alone was tested. Fenoglio later made some other, much more fantastical and completely unverifiable claims. According to his article *Cronistoria su oggetti volanti del passato* (“History of flying objects from the past”), published in the Italian UFO newsletter *Clypeus* during the 1960s, he appeared convinced that Alexander the Great had witnessed UFOs, using questionable evidence to back up his statements.[1109]

Vesco also omits any mention of his compatriot Giuseppe Belluzzo, and for a book attempting to explain away UFO sightings as “man-made flying saucers”, it is odd that he does not touch upon any of the projects listed by Lusar. It is also telling that the author does not name Schriever, Miethe or Habermohl either. Whilst none

of the Germans have ever claimed they worked on anything that could have resembled *Feuerball* or *Kugelblitz*, surely their alleged flying disc "aircraft" would have warranted a mention in Vesco's *Intercept*? Vesco finished his own book in or just before 1956, and therefore should have been aware of the German claims. Perhaps he felt their stories were too outlandish to include in a book already filled with non-verifiable information? Since Vesco's book was not published until 1968, Georg Klein had offered his "testimony" too early to include either of the Italian's radical weapons systems, and Lusar's own work was published in 1957, so there was no mention of *Feuerball* or *Kugelblitz*, and neither "project" was included. Nazi UFOs and Vesco's secret weapons apparently lived in different worlds, neither of which interconnected. Those trying to explain the UFO and "Foo Fighter" phenomena were presented with not just one, but a whole list of previously unknown secret German projects!

I managed to find an alleged eye-witness account of a device that could have fitted the description of one of the Italian's weapons, although it dated from the 1980s in a book by D. H. Haarmann, an author who drew heavily upon Vesco's "findings" when suggesting the Germans fielded much more effective *Wunderwaffen* than was actually the case. Haarmann includes a statement by *Oberstleutnant* R. M., an Austrian officer commanding a unit which was caught up in the general retreat from France into Germany. R. M. and some of his men apparently saw the following occur in the skies near Metz one day at the end of 1944:

"In the sky they observed an American bomber formation flying towards Germany, which, as usual, had orders to bomb German cities. Suddenly R. M. and his comrades saw how a bright point of light flew into this bomber group and maneuvered within it in quick zigzag flights. In a few moments about 15-20 machines fell out of the formation and fell on fire. The general reaction to this event was: 'At last the miracle weapons are coming.' But the miracle weapons did not come, at least not to influence the course of the war."[1110]

This sounded suspiciously like one of Renato Vesco's aerial *flak* mines. It is not clear whether Haarmann invented the account as it does not appear elsewhere. If 15 or 20 bombers had been lost from a single formation at the same time, this would have made history and worthy of inclusion in post-war accounts of American bomber operations over Europe. If *Natters* had ever been put into service, this description may also have fitted.

Vesco's *Intercept* was notoriously short on sources when it came to the descriptions, location, operations and fate of both *Feuerball* and *Kugelblitz*, which was odd given the plethora of footnotes that his chapters included. However, his notes referenced technical research that applied to more mundane and less advanced weapons, and locations of organisations that were alleged to have supplied parts for "his" devices. Beyond a single and unnamed witness who described a "fiery disc", Vesco had absolutely no proof whatsoever to back up his assertions. He had apparently stumbled across reference to the two devices when searching through the records of the British Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee (BIOS) and its American counterpart, CIOS. They created lists of technology, equipment and personnel that their collection teams were to locate and secure once Allied forces entered Germany. The lists were extremely detailed and were split up into categories, e.g. Aircraft, Rockets & Missiles, Mines, etc. BIOS and CIOS continued to issue reports after the end of the war when the Allies were "picking over the spoils" in Germany, even in areas that were due to be handed over to the Soviets. I have looked through the publicly available BIOS and CIOS files.[1111] Vesco's claim about the successful Ba 349 *Natter* mission is preposterous. There is no trace of anything that could be construed as *Feuerball* or *Kugelblitz*, Vesco simply stitched together his claims using reports of random pieces of research he lifted from BIOS and CIOS reports. It was one thing for the Germans to research these items, but another entirely to successfully integrate them. Vesco could not prove any of his wild tales. Despite his efforts to the contrary, these files do not give us the answers to the "Foo Fighters" mystery.

Before summing up, we should look at technology transfers to Japan during the war, as “Foo Fighters” were seen in the Pacific Theatre too.

Chapter 16:

“Foo Fighters”: Technology Transfers to Japan?

Operations which were discussed, but not attempted were a) Flights to America, (b) Flights to Japan, (c) Flights to area North of Singapore…

- KG 200 Operations Officer interrogation report, 1945.

Anyone who has studied the “Foo Fighter” encounters of WW2 will know that multiple sightings also occurred in the Pacific Theatre of Operations, throwing up two possible explanations. The first – and most likely – is that the phenomenon was in fact worldwide, and not simply confined to Europe. The second is that they were in fact German secret weapons, and the technology was transferred to Japan at some stage during the war, which allowed the creation of their own “Foo Fighters”. In this chapter, I shall investigate the likelihood of the latter option, as the Germans certainly did send blueprints and actual items across to Japan on several occasions before the course of the war made such transfers virtually impossible. It is exceedingly unlikely that Japanese designers and engineers came up with something along the lines of Vesco’s *Feuerball* or *Kugelblitz* on their own.

Between 1940 and 1942, several German surface transports managed to reach the Far East from ports in western France. They returned home with cargoes of crude rubber, a vital war material. However, only half of the 32 vessels dispatched survived both the outbound and return trips, and by the end of 1942 the Royal Navy, aided by the US Navy, had made it almost impossible for blockade runners to carry out their duties. MS *Ramses* was sunk in November 1942 on her way back to Europe from Batavia in Java, loaded with

around 4,000 tonnes of rubber.[1112] Another method had to be found instead, so submarines were chosen to fulfil these missions.

In August 1942, the Imperial Japanese Navy's submarine *I-30* arrived at the *Kriegsmarine's* U-boat base at Lorient, France on what was the first of several *Yanagi* ("Willow") technology transfer missions. The sub carried a cargo of mica and shellac, together with the plans for the Japanese Type 91 aerial torpedo. The vessel was large enough to carry a single Yokosuka E14Y *Glen* floatplane, and this was painted in fictitious markings, allowing the Germans to release stories that elements of the Japanese naval air service were flying from French bases. The submarine remained at Lorient until 22nd August, being fitted with a FuMB1 *Metox* set to give warning of approaching Allied ASW aircraft for its long journey across the Bay of Biscay and around Africa.[1113]

When the *I-30* left Lorient, she carried plans for the *Würzburg* air defence radar, eight German torpedoes, a complete Hs 293 air-to-surface missile, several PAK 40 anti-tank guns, one million yen's worth of industrial diamonds and fifty *Enigma* coding machines. The submarine arrived at Singapore on 13th October 1942. She departed for Japan later that day but struck a British mine shortly after leaving harbour, sinking with the loss of thirteen of her crew of 94, plus an engineer who was a passenger.[1114]

The Germans decided to try their own transfers, although there was little or no real co-ordination with the Japanese in terms of timing after the first attempt. The first U-boat to make the reciprocal voyage was the Type IX *U-180*, which left Brittany in February 1943 and rendezvoused with *I-29* in the Indian Ocean. She was carrying Subash Chandra Bose, the leader of the Indian National Army, who raised an army of 3,000 Indian POWs in Germany from troops serving under British control that had been captured in North Africa. Bose left them behind to create a similar force under Japanese control and was transferred to *I-29*. Two Japanese engineers travelled to France, going onto study submarine construction in Germany, and the U-boat also carried an amount of gold bullion for payment of earlier items shipped to Japan by "blockade runner"

vessels.[1115] *U-180* was soon followed by the Type IXC submarine *U-511*, which reached Kure in Japan during August 1943. This vessel had previously been employed in trials with rocket artillery launchers fitted to her deck, testing being carried out in the Baltic off Peenemünde. She was handed over to the IJN and then commissioned as the *RO-500*.[1116] The vessel survived the war and was surrendered to the Americans two years later. Another Type IXC, *U-1224*, was transferred to IJN control at Kiel naval yard in February 1944 and then sailed with a Japanese crew. Onboard was a cargo of optical glass, various plans and blueprints for the Me 163 *Komet* plus the Type IX submarine. *U-1224* was sunk off the Cape Verde Islands by a US Navy destroyer on 13th May 1944.[1117]

The Italian Navy also got in on the act, sending their submarine *Commandante Cappellini* from Bordeaux in May 1943 to Japan with a cargo of mercury, aluminium, blueprints for tank designs, bombs and small items of military equipment. She reached Singapore in mid-July and the stores were off-loaded, its captain planning to return with tin, rubber, opium and spices. However, the Italian surrender in September 1943 occurred before this happened. Her captain attempted to escape but was thwarted, and after some negotiation, the vessel was assigned to the *Kriegsmarine* as the *UIT-24*. She finally left Penang, Malaysia, in February 1944 with a mixed German and Italian crew onboard. However, her supply ship in the Indian Ocean was scuttled after being attacked by a Royal Navy destroyer, forcing the submarine to return to port. *UIT-24* never returned home but remained in Penang until May 1945 when the German collapse allowed the IJN to take her over.[1118] A second Italian vessel, the *Guiliani*, reached Singapore on 1st August 1943. After the surrender the following month, she was also taken into German service as *UIT-23*. Her return voyage began in February 1944, but the submarine was sunk a few days after leaving port. *Tazzoli* and *Barbarigo* departed Bordeaux in May and June 1943 but were both sunk before they could leave the Bay of Biscay. *Torelli* also left in June and managed to reach Penang in August 1943. She

was taken over by the Germans too but never returned to Europe. [1119]

I-34 departed Kure for France in October 1943 but was sunk on 13th November in the Straits of Malacca by a British submarine. Her sister vessel *I-29* left Japan at around the time the other sub was lost. *I-29* was carrying a cargo including tin, tungsten, rubber and opium. Arriving in the Bay of Biscay in March 1944, she was spotted by RAF anti-submarine aircraft but survived several attacks. The IJN vessel departed for home in April 1944 with a complete Walter HWK 109-509A rocket motor, as fitted to both the Me 163 *Komet* and Ba 349 *Natter*. She was also carrying construction and engineering plans for both the Me 163 and the Me 262 jet fighter. Reaching Singapore in July 1944, she then departed for Japan but was attacked and sunk by a force of three US Navy submarines in the Luzon Strait.[1120]

The last IJN submarine to embark upon a *Yanagi* mission was *I-52,* a C-3 cargo vessel. Leaving Japan in March 1944 with a cargo of precious metals plus several passengers who were destined to study German anti-aircraft techniques, she successfully rendezvoused with the Type IX *U-530* in the South Atlantic three months later. However, off the Cape Verde Islands the Japanese submarine was attacked and sunk by aircraft from the escort carrier *USS Bogue* (CVE-9). It is believed that if the *I-29* had reached France, an unspecified amount of uranium oxide would have been part of her cargo.[1121]

Two further *Kriegsmarine* U-boats attempted to sail from Germany to Japan before the end of the war. On 5th December 1944, *U-864* departed from Bergen in Norway with a cargo containing 65 tonnes of mercury and parts for the Me 262 jet fighter. She ran aground off the Norwegian coast, was forced to return to port for repairs and then set off again in February 1945. Three days after leaving Bergen, *U-864* was intercepted by a Royal Navy submarine and sunk with all hands.[1122]

March 1945 saw the last U-boat mission to Japan. *U-234*, originally laid down as a Type XB long-range minelayer but converted to a cargo carrier whilst under construction, was

dispatched from Kiel with various items of advanced technology. These include complete examples of the Hs 293 air-to-surface guided missile, technical drawings relating to the Me 262 jet fighter and 1,210lb (550kg) of uranium oxide, the latter contained in around fifty lead cubes. A production director for a Me 262 assembly plant were among the twelve passengers onboard the submarine. This was August Bringewald, a senior Messerschmitt engineer, and he was joined by Franz Ruf, another Messerschmitt employee, an industrial machinery specialist who had been assigned to oversee construction of jet and rocket factories in Japan. Several authors have suggested that a dismantled Me 262 was also loaded aboard the U-boat but it is difficult to see how this could have been achieved. Another passenger was *Oberst* Fritz von Sandrart, former commander of Bremen's *flak* defences. Having become something of an authority on anti-aircraft strategy, he had been ordered to help the Japanese bolster their own *flak* network. All three of these men will feature in the following chapter.

U-234 sailed from Kiel for Norway on 26th March 1945. En route she collided with another U-boat but suffered only minor damage. Leaving Kristiansand on 15th April 1945 for Japan, the submarine had reached the middle of the North Atlantic by the beginning of May. On the 4th, a radio message announcing that *Großdmiral* Karl Dönitz had become Führer following the death of Adolf Hitler. Her captain ordered the submarine to surface six days later and received Dönitz's last order informing all naval crews to stand down and surrender their vessels. *U-234* sailed for the nearest American port and it eventually arrived under US Navy escort at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. The uranium oxide was presumably taken to the Oak Ridge facility in Tennessee, where a diffusion plant was in operation as part of the Manhattan Project. Its "special cargo" was hidden from public knowledge for years due to the Cold War.[1123]

Plans to send plans for the Heinkel He011 turbojet engine to Japan had certainly been explored in March 1945, with hopes that they would have been included in a U-boat's cargo. However, these discussions were still at an early stage when U-234 sailed.[1124]

Mindful of the hazards in sending material from Germany, the Japanese naval attaché requested two copies of the plans so they could be sent by different routes. In any case, these slightly more advanced engines would not have provided the performance required to match the capabilities shown by the “Foo Fighters”.

Clearly, naval vessels, either surface or submerged, were never going to work given the poor success rate. Other methods were required. Even before WW2 had started, Germany had attempted to build an aircraft capable of flying non-stop between Berlin and Tokyo, the idea being that it would carry the Olympic torch from the site of the 1936 Winter Games at Garmisch-Partenkirchen to the Japanese capital for the start of the 1940 Summer Games. Originally conceived as a long-range reconnaissance aircraft, Messerschmitt’s design, known initially as *Projekt 1064*, was soon authorised and encouraged by the RLM when the latter realised it could break the world’s long-distance, non-stop flight record. Hitler himself was reportedly interested in the project and the planned record-breaking flight to Japan. The *Reich* was incredibly fond of prestige projects, especially in the fields of aviation and sport. Designated Me 261, the type was soon nicknamed *Adolphine* even before it was test flown, due to the Führer’s interest. Despite this high-level support, there was little Messerschmitt could do to speed up development of the aircraft as the company was geared up to producing Bf 109 fighters and Bf 110 *Zerstörer* (“destroyer”) heavy fighters and bomber escorts at its Augsburg factory.[1125] Any hope of having an aircraft built, tested and accepted by the *Luftwaffe* in time for the summer of 1940 had been dashed by the low priority the project eventually receive, and a final blow arrived when the Tokyo Games were cancelled due to the outbreak of war.

However, the RLM continued to see merit in the Me 261 design, believing it to offer an excellent long-range reconnaissance and courier aircraft. Work continued, albeit very slowly, on building the *Versuchs 1* prototype. The Me 261 V1 (coded “BJ+CP”) finally flew on 23rd December 1940. The V2 followed suit in the spring of 1941 and the third prototype finally took to the air in early 1943. The first

two had five crew, and the third machine sat seven and had more powerful engines. A ten hour-long flight was conducted with the Me 261 V3 in April 1943, but the RLM decided that the installation of photographic equipment would mean having to sacrifice some of the fuel load, thereby negating any advantage the aircraft had over existing types. The V3 was pressed into service as a reconnaissance machine in May 1943 but never carried out the flight to Japan. The Me 261 V1 and V2 are believed to have been destroyed in a bombing raid in 1944.[1126]

Early on in the war, very long-range aircraft had been suggested as a way of reaching Japan, possibly via Manchuria where Imperial Army units were based. However, it was not until mid-1943 that improved transport types were available to carry out missions of this length. One type that was earmarked for these ultra-long-range flights was the Junkers Ju 290, a four-engined cargo aircraft which had also been used in the maritime reconnaissance and anti-shipping roles, the latter with Hs 293 guided missiles and PC 1400X *Fritz X* "smart bombs". The Ju 290A-9 variant was planned for ultra-long-range reconnaissance and transport missions, fitted with extra fuel tanks and substantially reduced armament. Only three were completed, *w/n* 10182, 10183 and 10184.[1127] An earlier Ju 290A-5 maritime reconnaissance aircraft was initially selected to fly from northern Finland on a Great Circle route across eastern Siberia and into Manchuria in February 1944, but the mission was eventually put on hold when the Japanese could not agree on the route chosen. They did not want to be associated with anything that might bring the Russians into the war in the Pacific. Northern Finland had fallen to the Soviets by the time another serious attempt was made to try and complete the flight in December 1944, lengthening any possible flight still further, but alteration work to the Ju 290 selected for the task was delayed and it was therefore decided that a submarine would be used to carry out the mission. This was the *U-234.*

However, there are rumours that at least one Ju 290A-5 belonging to *Fernaufklarüngsgruppe* 5 (FAGr.5, or "Long-Range Reconnaissance Group 5") was fitted with long-range fuel tanks and

then actually flew to Manchuria, where personnel and important documents were exchanged with the Japanese before a return flight was performed.[1128] The information came courtesy of a defecting *Luftwaffe* pilot who told his interrogators in March 1945 that three Ju 290A-9s from FAGr.5 had been flown back to Germany for modifications at Finsterwalde. All had been stripped of their armament, dual controls and other unnecessary equipment, were fitted with extra fuel tanks and then readied for flights to Japan. According to the POW, Wolf Baumgart, he piloted the first flight to Manchuria himself, and a second mission was apparently carried out a week later. It is likely that the prisoner was spinning a tall tale. If such a mission ever took place, it would have been under the auspices of KG 200, the secretive *Luftwaffe* unit charged with carrying out a range of important missions, including agent drops and supply runs to far-off locations, occasionally using captured Allied bombers such as the B-17 Flying Fortress and B-24 Liberator. Even if a Ju 290 belonging to KG 200 had managed to fly to Manchuria or even Japan, its cargo space would have been severely limited due to the amount of fuel that was required for such a trip, and there are no surviving records of what the aircraft may have carried as cargo. Baumgart stated that only BMW 801 piston engines, not jet engines, were carried on the outbound flights, with rubber and alloys being brought back from Japan.[1129]

ADI(K), the Air Ministry intelligence section responsible for interrogating German POWs, produced a report titled *A Short History of KG 200*. The former operations officer from KG 200 had been interviewed, and confirmed that *"operations which were discussed, but not attempted were a) Flights to America, (b) Flights to Japan, (c) Flights to area North of Singapore."*[1130] It therefore appears that although planning may well have been carried out for a flight to Manchuria, missions were never attempted.

One further aircraft type could have made a Germany to Japan flight, but it's history is rather suspect, with the two airframes that were built being the subject of continued arguments as to exactly when they were actually constructed, where they were flown and what their

ultimate fates were. Two examples of the six-engined Ju 390 long-range reconnaissance aircraft were built, but the construction dates are hotly disputed. From what information survives, both of them appear to have been in *Luftwaffe* service by the end of 1943 although this is argued over by many wartime aviation historians. There are even suggestions that a bomber variant of the aircraft was designed for use by the Imperial Japanese Air Force.[1131] I believe this to be somewhat far-fetched. A third prototype was also being built but the war ended before it could be finished. There is also the matter of a notorious (and almost certainly invented) claim that one of them flew a non-stop flight to a point some 12 miles off New York in 1944 and then returned safely to its French base.[1132] Details of the flight were also "revealed" by Baumgart, the German POW responsible for the stories about flights to Japan. The Ju 390's range was estimated at around 6,000 miles (9700km) and either or both of the prototypes that were built could have made a non-stop flight from Finland across to Manchuria. One apparently underwent trials with FAGr.5 in France during 1944 but no records or witnesses exist to confirm whether any long-range technology transfer flight ever took place. If one is using the Ju 390 as evidence that flights to Japan occurred, they are on shaky ground.

The Allies were certainly interested in whether the Germans had given the Japanese turbojet technology during the war. The following question was one of numerous queries posed to officials charged with development of the Me 163 *Komet* and Me 262 during post-war interrogations:

"What is known of Japanese interest in German jet-propelled aircraft? How far has that interest progressed and what has been supplied to Japan in the way of prototype aircraft, aircraft and power unit components, drawings and blueprints, fuel production and storage?"[1133]

The tools to transfer the plans or an actual example of a secret weapons project that was responsible for the "Foo Fighter" sightings

were certainly in existence during WW2. However, the available information suggests that the most advanced technology transferred to the Japanese involved the Me 163 rocket-propelled interceptor, the Me 262 jet fighter and the Hs 293 guided missile. All three were certainly regarded as important weapons by the Germans when they were being developed, all having the potential to influence the course of the war. Although most of these transfers involved the loss of the submarines and their important cargoes, the Japanese did receive a basic instructional manual for the Me 163 in July 1944, courtesy of an officer who left the *I-29* at Singapore and flew to Japan. Whilst this was not the same as blueprints for the interceptor, the Japanese managed to create a set of plans from which they built their own version of the Me 163, the Mitsubishi J8M1 *Shusui* ("Sharp Sword"). The only prototype to be tested was readied for its first powered flight on 7th July 1945, but its rocket motor suddenly cut out when the aircraft was climbing away from the airfield, and the pilot crashed whilst trying to carry out an emergency landing. Modifications ensued and production of the type continued into August 1945, but the war ended before a second flight could be carried out.[1134] The Japanese also tested a jet aircraft which bore a superficial resemblance to the Me 262 (the Nakajima *Kikka*, or "Orange Blossom"), but it was an indigenous design with no input or help from the Germans.[1135] There was also the small matter of stocks of uranium oxide being transported to Japan, but this falls outside the scope of this book.

Proponents of the *Feuerball* and *Kugelblitz*, or some as yet unheard of German device, have long argued that these alleged weapons may have been transferred to the Japanese and were therefore responsible for the rash of "Foo Fighter" sightings reported by American bomber crews flying missions against the Home Islands during the latter stages of WW2. However, no evidence has ever been found to support such suggestions. It is also much more likely that these devices never existed in the first place.

In the last few chapters I have attempted to prove how Nazi UFOs and rumoured German secret weapons programmes could not

have been the source of the “Foo Fighter” reports made in WW2, for the very reason that these aircraft and *flak* mine programme simply did not exist. The list of problems that the Germans encountered in designing, building, testing and then operating jet and rocket-powered aircraft and missiles was very long indeed. It demonstrates why there was little hope of any further advanced technological breakthroughs in aeronautics or electronics being realised and also put into practice before the end of the war, let alone radical plans for fleets of flying discs or spherical anti-aircraft devices.

When existing *Luftwaffe* aircraft and missiles, together with the mythical weapons programmes are ruled out of the equation, in trying to explain the “Foo Fighter” phenomenon we are left again with the unknown. However, we know that in early 1945, the Americans were at least trying to find out what the strange lights in the sky represented. Although it appeared that these enquiries were getting nowhere, and the end of the war removed any sense of priority, work was still going on behind the scenes to determine what the “Foo Fighters” were. We will now turn our attention to the efforts being made in this regard during the remainder of 1945 and afterwards.

Chapter 17:

Back To The “Foo Fighters”: Post-war Investigations and Other Links

If the term ‘flying saucers’ had been popular in 1943-1945, these objects would have been so labelled.

- The “Robertson Panel” Report, 16th February 1953.

We have now looked at various “explanations” regarding the “Foo Fighters” made by individuals who claimed to have connections with or knowledge of German secret weapons projects. Since these can almost certainly be dismissed out of hand, at least until more evidence is presented to prove otherwise, all that remains is to look at the various post-war investigations that were carried out into the phenomenon. As the sightings died off with the end of the war in Europe, and then in the Pacific three months later, there did not seem to be any urgency shown in discovering which German secret weapon was responsible for all of the encounters over Europe.

When the Germans finally surrendered on 8th May 1945, the war had three more months to run in the Far East, although this was not known at that time. Key USSTAF technical personnel moved to the Pacific within a matter of weeks, including the entire Scientific Advisory Group, together with radar expert David Griggs. Operational intelligence efforts now shifted away from Europe to focus on the Japanese, who still presented a threat, if a diminishing one. Of course, since September 1944, when the Allies first set foot in western Germany, technical intelligence teams had begun to sift through the ruins of the *Reich’s* aviation and armaments industries, plus a multitude of scientific and research establishments. This work continued into 1945 and 1946, although if Air Technical Intelligence was expecting to find a “smoking gun” in terms of the “Foo Fighters”, they were in for a big disappointment. Information about existing jet

and rocket-powered aircraft, anti-aircraft missiles and hints of research into devices that could, at a push, have been part of Vesco's radical aerial *flak* mine systems, had been discovered. However, that was all the Allies turned up despite their best efforts. Hints did not turn into actual devices.

Three days earlier, when the war in Europe was almost over, an official document titled *Trends in Development of German Weapons for Countering the Allied Bomber* was published, based on interrogations of two prisoners of war, one previously working on guided missile projects at Peenemünde and the other at the RLM over winter 1944/45. The latter had also worked directly under the Chief Technical Armaments officer, *General* Diesing, and he had attended meetings of the Armaments Staff in Berlin three times a week during this period. If anyone had knowledge of possible German secret weapons that could have caused the "Foo Fighter" reports, these POWs fitted the bill.

However, the information they provided Allied interrogators only related to the *flak* rockets that Air Intelligence were already well aware of, if not the extent to which they had been developed. Whereas the Me 262 jet fighter had been suggested as a possible culprit by the British Air Ministry, there was a sneaking suspicion across the various air intelligence services that one or more types of *Luftwaffe* missile may well have caused the sightings. Any lingering suggestions that this was the case were quickly dashed once this report was read. In summary, it stated:

"Both of these men were in a position to know the most recent trends of development in weapons to counter Allied bomber attacks on Germany."

Seven missile projects were listed in total. They were the Henschel Hs 117 *Schmetterling* ("Butterfly") and Hs 298, Ruhrstahl X-4 and X-7, Rheinmetall Borsig's *Rheintochter* and *Wasserfall*, and Messerschmitt's *Enzian* project. Most of these have been discussed elsewhere in this book. Some of the details were incorrect, but it is not known whether these was as a result of faulty information from

the prisoners or the intelligence staff compiling the report. The X-7 was believed to be an anti-aircraft missile fired from the ground, a development of the X-4 which had been tested but not be put into operational service due to a lack of rocket motors as the BMW factory producing them had been bombed. In reality, the X-7 *Rotkäppchen* (“Little Red Riding Hood”) was an anti-tank missile.

In addition, the “V-1 Fighter” was further described as the *Natter*, used for ramming purposes. This had indeed been the Ba 349’s original mission, but Bachem had been forced to change the nature of the rocket-powered interceptor early in the design process due to a complete lack of interest from the RLM. Clearly someone had mixed up the *Natter* project with the piloted V-1 flying bomb, officially designated Fi 103 *Reichenberg.* While all of these projects had the potential to cause problems for the Allies if they had been put into operational service, they could not have caused the huge number of “Foo Fighter” encounters listed elsewhere in this book.

In any case, the report confirmed that none of these weapons systems had entered service, which was true.[1136] The Hs 117 came close although the war ended before plans for deployment could be realised. Only the X-7 *Rotkäppchen* (“Little Red Riding Hood”) may have been used in anger. Rumours persist that several of these missiles were employed against Soviet IS-3 Stalin tanks in combat trials just before the Battle of Berlin. The French further developed the X-7 design as the basis for their Nord SS.10.

Allied investigations into German research and technology was coming up with all sorts of information, both from examining facilities and also the interrogation of prisoners of war and civilian scientists. The latter were not locked up, but their movement was effectively restricted, as interrogation teams frequently called upon them for questioning, at least throughout the remainder of 1945. Some of the details gleaned from such sources proved invaluable, other pieces less so – and then there were those who appeared to be indulging in flights of fancy. V-2 rockets had been, and still are touted as one possible explanation for the “Foo Fighters”, but these weapons flew in ballistic trajectories, guidance being limited to aiming them at large

cities such as London. More precise forms of control, including having a pilot onboard, seemed ludicrous. However, *Direktor* Kurt Eckener, manager of Luftschiffbau Zeppelin at Friedrichshafen, which built fuel tanks and other parts for the rockets during WW2, provided a statement which appeared to suggest that a manned V-2 was developed:

"The only development of A4 [the V-2 rocket] of which Eckener had heard was one of the same size with lateral wings which was to have a range of 10000km and a height of 60km. One of these had been constructed at Peenemünde. It is possible that this might have been flown by a pilot. One of Eckener's test pilots was exceedingly keen to fly an A4 and had asked him to approach [Wernher] von Braun to suggest this."[1137]

A winged V-2 rocket was developed in WW2, but it was never intended to be piloted. Known as the A4b (or the A9), this variant was designed to pull out of its terminal descent as it reached thicker atmosphere and enter into a shallow glide to a point overhead its target in order to extend its range. Once above the target area, the rocket would enter a vertical dive. Testing began at Blizna in Poland towards the end of 1944 but only two missiles were ever launched. Both were failures. If anyone seriously thought that a manned V-2 could have accounted for the "Foo Fighter" sightings, they had no idea of the reality of the situation.

Tentative details of a further German missile, this time an air-to-air one, seemed much more plausible. The Rheinmetall-Borsig R-100BS had been designed to be used by the Me 262 jet fighter, an unguided weapon with a warhead filled with 460 incendiary pellets. The missile would have been detonated at a pre-set distance, although the launching aircraft required a FuG 218 *Neptun* radar set to track the projectile and an *Oberon* automatic firing system. The latter would have fired the R-100BS automatically once the Me 262 came into range of the target bomber. All the pilot needed to do was keep his target locked into a special gunsight linked to *Oberon*.

However, neither this nor the rocket reached initial flight trials stage during the war, and it is not even clear whether such a weapon could have been deployed at night.[1138] If the R-100BS had been developed earlier, and cleared for nocturnal use, it could have been responsible for some of the mysterious night-time “rocket” sightings between 1942 and 1944.

One project that sounded promising, at least in terms of the altitude that was being claimed, was the so-called *Zerlegungsrakete* (“Disintegration Rocket”). According to prisoner testimony, this was an anti-aircraft missile, or rather a cluster of them attached to one or more main rockets that were used to reach 16,400 feet (5000m). At this point, the cluster would be freed to continue in a dispersed pattern towards the target, presumably an Allied bomber formation. The maximum height that was claimed for the weapon was 49,200 feet (15000m). According to the prisoner, ten had been tested in March 1945 but work had soon halted on the project.[1139] If a similar device had been used by the Luftwaffe in 1944, it would have explained some of the reports made by RAF crews over the Balkans. Unfortunately, *Zerlegungsrakete* may have been a figment of the prisoner’s imagination. No details have ever been found to corroboration his claims.

An American “Flak Conference” was held in London between 1st-11th June 1945, involving representatives from the Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces (including XII Tactical Air Command, responsible for the 64th FW which had the 415th NFS among its constituent units). Also at the conference were staff from the Mediterranean Air Force and USSTAF, the British presence being confined to someone from M.I.15 (War Office). The event was a forum to discuss numerous aspects of the German *flak* defences during WW2, particularly those situated around Hamburg, Leuna and Ploeşti. The conference reports make interesting reading on their own, but buried in the notes regarding Hamburg was the following statement, based on visits to the area, examination of captured installations and the questioning of *General* Wolz, commander of the city’s *flak* defences:

"Our interrogation revealed that there were no secret Flak weapons employed in the Hamburg defences. (…) The equipment they have been using, and the equipment they contemplated using, if the war continued, was no different from that which we knew about. (…) There were no anti-aircraft rockets actually in use in the Hamburg defenses."[1140]

If the Germans had been able to develop and field an operational *flak* ground-to-air missile, as some have put forward as a possible solution for "Foo Fighter" reports, it would have been logical for the *Luftwaffe* to defend a high-value target such as Hamburg with the new weapon. In addition to publishing reports on missile projects as indicated earlier, the Allies were examining actual captured examples. No less than seven *Rheintochter flak* rockets were made available to the RAF's 2nd Tactical Air Force by the USSTAF's Exploitation Division.[1141] Other missiles were also being looked at closely during the same period, so the American and British technical air intelligence teams must have been aware of their limitations.

At the same time, Operation *Lusty* involved the collection of airworthy or near-complete examples of high-performance and otherwise interesting *Luftwaffe* aircraft, such as the Ar 234 *Blitz*, Do 335 *Pfeil*, He 162 *Volksjäger*, He 219 *Uhu* ("Owl"), Me 163 *Komet* and Me 262. Airworthy examples were being flown to Airfield A-23 (Cherbourg), sometimes using German assistance, and then loaded onto the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS *Reaper* for transit to New York. All of these aircraft types were included in Wright Field's "Category 'One' List" of required equipment dated May 1945.[1142] Two Ba 349 *Natters* (see Chapter 15) were also dispatched to the US by "fast sealift" in June 1945, on the direct order of General Spaatz.[1143] Numerous aircraft also ended up in British and French hands for technical examination. Yet none of these types were able to match the flight characteristics displayed by the "Foo Fighters".

The Air Technical Intelligence teams scouring Germany for evidence of advanced technology began to dig up information on radical new weapons. Personnel searching the Focke-Wulf facility at Bad Eilsen in Lower Saxony discovered references to Lorin ramjets, used by a proposed but unnamed vertical take-off interceptor. A small Lorin ramjet was attached to each end of three “wings” (looking more like short but wide rotor blades), fixed to a “collar” that rotated around a point a third of the way along the machine’s fuselage. The “wings” could tilt independently of each other in order to turn the craft. Wheels were attached to the cruciform tail fins, so the aircraft sat on its tail whilst on the ground. Three small rocket motors provided take-off thrust. It was believed that ramjets would allow the craft to reach altitudes much higher than conventional machines. They also offered lower fuel consumption and could run on any type of combustible fluid, gas or liquid, which could be vapourised. A small Lorin ramjet proposed for the project had been built and tested before the end of the war.[1144] The subject of this report was the Focke-Wulf *Triebflügel* (“Thrust Wing”), designed in late 1944 but which never proceeded beyond wind-tunnel testing of a full-size models. Clearly, this was never going to be a “Foo Fighter” candidate.

Further finds included paperwork relating to the Focke-Wulf Ta 183 jet fighter project plus the first prototype of the Blohm und Voss Bv 155, a high-altitude interceptor aircraft.[1145] However, whilst these machines would have offered capabilities way in excess of Allied piston-engine types, they did not come close to matching the strange lights reported during the war.

An intriguing memo, which on the surface seemed to validate Renato Vesco’s claims about German devices capable of interfering with engine ignition systems, was sent to the US 12th Army Group by USSTAF’s Exploitation Division in early June 1945:

“Headquarters AAF [Army Air Force] requesting information on German device for remote interference with operation of aircraft engines. Gette [Air Technical Intelligence in Munich] reported in

possession of knowledge this subject. Please expedite all information and sources of same."[1146]

However, nothing more appears to have been heard on this subject, and the matter appears to have been dropped.

Further investigation work was going on elsewhere in Germany, as huge stashes of documents had also been discovered. These included the entire *Luftwaffe* archives, which not only provided details on wartime operations, but also those relating to WW2 aircraft designs, plus production of related weapons. Also recovered were around a quarter of a million volumes from the German Patent Office. If the "Foo Fighters" had been a new Nazi secret weapon, then there would almost certainly be references to them within these files. Nothing appears to have been discovered.

In addition to seizing paperwork, Air Technical Intelligence staff had also found and were interrogating various POWs about "Foo Fighters", or as officials termed them, "Balls of Fire". On 21st August 1945, a memo was sent by the US Strategic Air Forces in Europe's Current Intelligence Section to Lt. Col. Eric Warburg, who led the department dealing with the interrogations of prominent POWs. Warburg had questioned former *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Goering following his capture in May 1945. The memo to Warburg was on the subject of "Balls of Fire":

"1. This office has received a cable from [the] War [Department] requesting that Air Interrogators be alerted to obtain complete information from German Electronic Technicians, Ordnance Technicians and Luftwaffe personnel concerning balls of fire. They suggest that anti-aircraft personnel present at Rhine River must be interrogated concerning the appearance of balls of fire during the winter of 1944. They have further specified that a list of questions be put to such personnel interrogated for answers complied in some form of report and that photographs, drawings or models of ball of fire, if available, be shipped to A-2, Washington. The questions they wish answered are attached hereto.

2. This cable has been referred to Flak Section, USSAFE, and undoubtedly some officer will be assigned to amass the data collected from your interrogations as well as other technical sources. Technical Intelligence has also been notified as to what is wished and will contribute their share, probably through the Flak officer assigned to the project.

3. Undoubtedly, when the aforementioned officer is appointed, he will contact you direct. However, suggest you cull your files for available information and direct where and when possible your interrogations towards securing the answers desired by the War Department. For the present, information now on base or subsequently received can be forwarded directly to Current Intelligence Section."[1147]

It is clear from this memo, buried away in the repository of intelligence files from the summer of 1945, that the War Department in Washington was not yet ready to give up on finding out just what had been witnessed in the night-time skies over Europe. The mention of the "Rhine River" and "the winter of 1944" were direct references to the "Foo Fighters" that had been reported by USAAF night-fighter crews based in Belgium and France at that time, even though "balls of fire" as a listed phenomenon had been seen much earlier, even as far back as 1943. The list of questions that were attached were just as interesting:

"Questions Concerning Balls Of Fire:

What is the German name for balls of fire?
What is the size, shape, weight of the missile?
What type of launcher is employed?
What is the propulsion charge?
What is the explosive charge?
What is the duration of flight, maximum effective altitude, lethal radius of burst?

Is the device radar, radio or infra-red controlled?
Is the ball of fire equipped with a homing device?
What type of fusing is employed?
Is the ball of fire an air to air or ground to air missile?
When were balls of fire manufactured? By whom?
When were balls of fire first used? Where?
Who was responsible for balls of fire development in Germany?
What information concerning balls of fire was passed to Japan? By Whom? When?
Is Doctor Schlicke connected in any way with the development for the balls of fire?
Are there photographs, drawings, or models of balls of fire available for shipment to the United States?"

This list was quite thorough, and the mention of *Doktor* Heinz Schlicke is very interesting. He was one of the passengers onboard U-234 which departed Kiel at the end of March 1945, detailed in the previous chapter dealing with technology transfers to Japan. A naval officer and expert in creating infra-red fuses and also bomb disposal, who had studied oscillators and sub-harmonics at the University of Dresden before the war, Heinz Schlicke had been charged with transporting advanced technology to the Japanese.[1148] He was also questioned about his possible role in accompanying the stocks of uranium oxide discovered aboard the U-boat. Ensconced in a POW camp in Virginia, Dr. Schlicke was eventually allowed to return to Germany in 1946 but was soon recruited to work in America under Operation *Paperclip*. He worked at the Office of Naval Research on Long Island, working on low-observable technology.[1149] The question about Japan was of pressing importance as the Americans were due to send their first batch of personnel to the Home Islands just a week later and would be soon sifting through the spoils of war there too.

Oberst Fritz von Sandrart, the *Luftwaffe* officer sent to bolster Japan's *flak* defences and captured aboard *U-234*, was also questioned about the "balls of fire" shortly after the war. Interrogators

from the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) questioned von Sandrart towards the end of May 1945. One of the things he was asked came from of a list of questions forwarded to ONI by Air Intelligence in Britain. Number twenty on the British list was as follows:

"Allied air crew operating over Germany late last year reported encountering colored balls of fire. What is the explanation of these balls of fire? Were they due to use of some secret German weapon? If so, what was that weapon and how successful was its use?"

The interrogating officer dutifully recorded *Oberst* von Sandrart's response:

"P/W asserts that the colored balls of fire encountered by air crews operating over Germany were only experimental weapons and later shelved as impractical in operation. It was a weapon used by the air force and not by the anti-aircraft units. Planes would climb far above the ceiling of enemy bombers and release a bomb with a time-fuse, which theoretically would detonate at the level of the attacking formation. The successes however placed the idea back into experimentation phase. The P/W is at loss to give any further information and suggests that technical people in the Luftwaffe and especially those familiar with experiments be approached."[1150]

Fritz von Sandrart was clearly describing experiments with "bombing" the American daylight bomber formations and not the "Foo Fighters". The two Messerschmitt staff members were also asked the same questions. Whilst neither had an explanation for the "balls of fire", one of them had reportedly witnessed the phenomenon over Munich but in the absence of information simply assumed it was some new form of *flak* weapon. It seemed that the relevant questions were being asked, but the German prisoners of war did not have any answers.

Although dealing with Japanese developments, a document prepared by the US Navy's Technical Air Intelligence Center (TAIC)

at the start of July 1945 suggested the entire range of secret German weapons as contenders for the mysterious phenomenon. In the July report, titled *Possible Japanese Jet and Rocket Development*, no less than six separate items were considered, all being lumped under the heading “Balls of Fire”. It suggested that the Japanese were producing their own versions of the V-1 flying bomb, Me 163 *Komet* rocket-powered interceptor and one or two guided missile types. The first two items were certainly true. More pertinent to our story is the section headed *Ground Launched Anti-Aircraft Rockets*:

“Colored balls of fire were reported by the Allied air crews over Germany in 1944; no satisfactory explanation has yet been received from German sources except that they may have been either anti-aircraft rockets designed to operate automatically when approaching a bomber formation, or possibly air-launched Hs 293s. A further possibility for some of the ‘slow and hovering’ balls of fire is a ground rocket that may contain an illuminating and/or an incendiary agent that drifts downwards on a parachute.”[1151]

TAIC had been formed in mid-1944 to evaluate captured Japanese aircraft, centralising and coordinating the work carried out by a number of smaller intelligence units in the field. However, in one regard, they were way off the mark. The Henschel Hs 293 glide-bomb could never have been a serious contender for a “Foo Fighter”. It was certainly air-launched but was only designed to attack shipping and land targets. As stated elsewhere in this book, the company developed the Hs 298 air-to-air missile, but it was not a success and never saw operational use. Mention of a “ground rocket” may well have referred to the *Scheinsignalrakete* but it could not change direction in mid-flight, follow aircraft or maintain station off their wingtips.

Brig.-Gen. George C. McDonald was the Assistant Chief of Staff, A-2, Headquarters United States Air Forces in Europe. On 28th September 1945 he received a memo from Lt. Col. A. R. Sullivan,

US Signal Corps. It dealt with two subjects connected to the “Foo Fighter Story”:

“1. It is considered that the following have been thoroughly investigated and have proven to have no basis of fact.

a. Remote interference with aircraft. Investigations have been completed on the subject and it is considered that there is no means presently known which was in development or use by the German Air Force which could interfere with engines of aircraft in flight. All information available through interrogations, equipment and documents has been thoroughly investigated and the subject may be closed with negative result.

b. Balls of Fire. As far as can be determined from extensive interrogations, investigations of documents, and field trips, there is no basis of fact in the reports made by aircrews concerning balls of fire, other than that phenomena similar to balls of fire may have been produced by jet aircraft or missiles. This subject may be closed with negative results.”[1152]

This should have marked the end of the investigation, but McDonald was clearly a source of information for other officials who wanted answers. Less than two weeks later, he received a cable from the War Department in Washington D.C. asking about the mysterious “Balls of Fire” that USAAF aircrew had seen during the war. Dated 9th October 1945, Brig.-Gen. McDonald’s reply to Major-General E. R. (“Pete”) Quesada, the Assistant Chief of Air Intelligence Staff in Washington, is quite detailed and thorough, referencing Sullivan’s doubts about the veracity of the “Balls of Fire”. His opening paragraph sets out his conclusions:

“Exhaustive investigation of German technical personnel and American technical sources in European Theater of Operations

reveals no confirmatory evidence of German use of so called 'Balls of Fire'".[1153]

Eleven different American and British agencies were contacted, including the ALSOS Mission which was looking for any evidence of the German atom bomb programme. According to the memo, the situation was clear:

"None of the above agencies have been able to find any trace of the use of a missile or weapon that would give the appearance of the reported 'Ball of Fire'. Lt. Col. Sullivan, head of the E. I. S. USAFE, is of the opinion that we now know of all German developments, and he is unable to find any connection between them and the 'Ball of Fire'. He also reports that the aircrew reports of the phenomena are very inconsistent, and he believes that the 'Ball of Fire' is a mythical phenomenon to which unusual appearances of anti-aircraft measures were attributed. Lt. Col. O'Mara, Technical Intelligence Section, USAFE, who has also made an extensive search to determine the origin of the 'Ball of Fire' concurs with Lt. Col. Sullivan's conclusion."[1154]

McDonald's staff had interviewed some thirteen different prominent Germans, including Dr. Georgii, the former chief of the *Forschungsfuhrung* ("Special Research Institute"), Dr. Fritz Halder, former chief of guided missile research and Dpl. Ing. Hans Zacher, who worked on the Bachem Ba 349 *Natter* project. Also on the list were Dr. Helmut Schelp, chief at *Sondertriebwerken* ("Special Engines"), Dr. Waninger, the Managing Director of the Rheinmetall Borsig, and Dr. Kline, Waninger's deputy. Kline had previously worked on rocket development at Marienfelde. *General* Walther von Axthelm, who had been *General der Flakwaffe* ("Inspector of Anti-Aircraft Artillery") and commander of 1. *Flakkorps*, and *General der Flieger* Karl Koller, *Chef des Generalstabs der Luftwaffe* ("Air Force Chief of Staff") were included on the list and were both questioned. The document confirmed that none of the thirteen questioned could

shed any light on the “Foo Fighters”. It listed all of the prominent Germans and their individual responses:

“General der Flak Artillerie Von Axthelm knew of no project or experiment carried out within his own department which could possibly be the ‘Ball of Fire’.

General Koller, Chief of Staff Luftwaffe, also had never heard of the phenomenon seen by the Allied formations.

Dr. Georgii stated that had any project such as the ‘Ball of Fire’ been designed in Germany, he would have heard or known of it, because of his position, chief of special research in the German Reich.

Dr. Halder had no idea of what the trailing ‘Ball of Fire’ could be, other than the exhaust from a jet plane at night or static electricity caused by the air disturbance from a great number of planes. He was sure that Germany did not make any guided missile to which the ‘Ball of Fire’ phenomenon could be attributed.

Dr. Schelp, Chief of the Special Information Branch, stated that he knew of no aircraft or rocket designed in Germany that could be this mysterious ‘Ball of Fire’.

Dr. Waninger stated that he knew of all tests and experimental projects which were going on at Leba [Poland], an experimental station, and stated that he could not possibly imagine what this particular ‘Ball of Fire’ could be. He, like Dr. Georgii and others, consistently suggested that it might possibly be static electricity or some electrical disturbance due to unusual weather conditions.

Dr. Ruhlemann knew of no developments that were under way nor could he ascribe any developments to the seen phenomena.

Dr. Stutzer stated that he knew of nearly all of the electrical developments which were going on in the German Reich and that he had never heard such a phenomenon mentioned prior to being interviewed.

Dpl. Ing. Voight did not think that anything that Messerschmitt was developing could resemble the ‘Ball of Fire’, nor could he give any information as to what it might be. He consistently ruled out the possibility of the ‘Ball of Fire’ being the exhaust from a 163 jet

propelled aircraft. This fuel was a cold propellant which was flameless. He spoke of the Horten Brothers Flying Wing, which was under development, but this possibility is negated by the fact that only two of the Jet type flying wings were known to have been manufactured, only one of which underwent tests. The reported instances of the 'Ball of Fire' far exceed the tests made with the Flying Wing, if such an aircraft had been tested against Allied formations.

Almost all of the above mentioned scientists stated there was a remote possibility that the 'Natter' (BP20) rocket launched, rocket propelled, piloted aircraft could possibly be the 'Ball of Fire'. However, Dpl. Ing. Hans Zacher, designer and test engineer for the 'Natter', stated that his 'Natter' could not possibly be the 'Ball of Fire'.

Dpl. Ing. Kracht, Jet Airplane designer, also could give no information as to what this 'Ball of Fire' might be.

Drs. Georgii, Waninger, Kline and Schelp should have known of the existence of a development resembling the 'Ball of Fire'. However, they were at a loss to connect the description of the 'Ball of Fire' with anything that had been used or tested against Allied formations by the German Reich. Added to the difficulty of solving the 'Ball of Fire' is the fact that no reports included or described anything but the so-called 'Ball of Fire'.

I recommend that the active search for the 'Ball of Fire' be dropped. However, all agencies will continue with the search for the answer in addition to their present missions.

The conclusion has been reached that the so-called 'Ball of Fire' phenomena may be the accumulation of a various number of tests which were conducted with different types of guided missiles at a number of testing grounds in and outside of Germany. The guided missile program within the United States should be studied and the effect of different fuels under various atmospheric conditions should be noted and compared with the reports of the so-called 'Ball of Fire'. Even though the top German Scientists disclaim that any projects have been carried out by the Germans which can resemble the 'Ball of Fire', there is the possibility that the propellant used in the guided

missiles and rocket-type planes may show up as 'Balls of Fire' or large flames to members of aircrew."[1155]

Even though there was provision for the named agencies to continue the search for answers, the message was clear. There was simply nothing to be found. Those who should have been in the know about a secret weapon that could run rings around Allied aircraft and was impervious to gunfire, were oblivious to its existence. There was not even a hint of a radical new weapon to chase down and find. Searches of the evaluation reports buried in the BIOS and CIOS files turn up nothing that could be remotely taken for a "Foo Fighter", or even Renato Vesco's clearly mythical *Feuerball* and *Kugelblitz.* Whatever had been witnessed by Allied aircrew, it did not seem to have a wartime German origin.

Further enquiries may have been made but to all intents and purposes the hunt for clues had finally hit a dead end. The Americans, possibly worried about Russian attempts to exploit any radical German wartime technology in the new post-war Europe, appeared to be the only Allied country that was even prepared to investigate what the "Balls of Fire" were after the war had ended. However, even their interest had run its course. As for the British, unless paperwork could be unearthed to prove that "Foo Fighters" or "Balls of Fire" existed, or the Americans pointed them in the right direction, well, they seemed happy enough to forget the whole thing, as no official Air Ministry investigation was performed during the immediate post-war period.

The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the secret American wartime intelligence agency that was a precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), had apparently carried out its own study into what was behind the "Foo Fighters". According to CIA historian Gerald K. Haines, who wrote an article about the organisation's role in the study of UFOs, this had occurred during the war. The following was included in an endnote to Haines article, and referred to David Jacobs' book *The UFO Controversy in America*:

"Fearing they might be Japanese or German secret weapons, OSS investigated but could find no concrete evidence of enemy weapons and often filed such reports in the 'crackpot' category. The OSS also investigated possible sightings of German V-1 and V-2 rockets before their operational use during the war."[1156]

However, Jacobs' book did not refer to the OSS but merely mentioned the following about an Air Force investigation, although his text managed to omit the organisation's words:

"The United States Eighth Army [sic] made a cursory investigation of the foo-fighters and concluded they were the product of 'mass hallucinations'. No one was overly concerned with them at the time because they did not appear to be hostile. Their explanation or source, however, remains a mystery."[1157]

The Western Allies had drawn a complete blank regarding the origin, nature and intent of the "Foo Fighters". That only left the Russians. If they had looked through the rubble-strewn German aviation facilities located in their own sector for evidence of strange lights in the skies, no information has ever come to light. If they had found designers, weapons and/or craft from a "Foo Fighter" project, then they would have been removed to Russia long before their own infamous "snatch operation" was carried out in October 1946. Around 6,000 rocket, missile, radar and aerodynamics specialists, together with their families, were spirited away during the course of a single day, taken to the Soviet Union where they were forced to resume the work they had performed for the Nazis.

Whilst officialdom seemed unable to discover the secrets behind the "Foo Fighters", that didn't stop former USAAF and US Army officers offering their own suggestions to anyone who would listen, including newspapers editors who published their comments in the wake of the new "flying saucer" reports sweeping across America in the late 1940s. An early example of this was a piece published in the Olean *Times Herald* on 8th July 1947, immediately following the

revelations behind the discovery of a crashed disc near Roswell, New Mexico. Entitled *"Saucers May Be 'Foo Fighters', Flier Suggests"*, it quoted a former Air Force officer, Capt. Dewey Ballard, who was then a recruiter but who had been a pilot in WW2. Ballard suggested a possible explanation for the new crop of "saucer" reports:

"Assuming they are not some hoax or hallucination, I think when we get done with it, they will turn out to be foo fighters."

The former pilot had apparently not seen any himself but knew personnel who had. He believed that the "Foo Fighters" were employed by the Germans as a "psychological weapon", designed to keep their people "stirred up or excited". The newspaper also quoted another (unnamed) former officer who believed the saucers were *"being developed by the Army as the American type of 'foo fighter'"*. [1158] On the same day, the *Morning Avalanche*, based in Lubbock, Texas (which would be the site of a famous UFO sighting in August 1951, dismissed as nothing but moths or plovers reflecting street lights) reported another former airman's comments on the "saucer" craze. Capt. Charles Odom, a B-17 pilot, suggested the following, without divulging exactly how he had acquired this information:

"The flying discs might be 'crystal balls' similar to those he said were used by the Nazis. He said those balls were electronically operated, and while in mid-air would send back to a radar screen on the ground the altitude, speed and other data of bombers it approached. He said the balls would fly up to the altitude of bombers, were apparently magnetized, and then flew along with the plane formations." [1159]

Colonel Howard McCoy, who had been on the CIOS panel during WW2 and had helped to direct intelligence efforts into finding and exploiting Nazi scientific and technological advances, was involved in the Swedish "ghost rockets" investigation in 1946, albeit quietly.

He visited the country in order to obtain information on the sightings. In December 1946, McCoy was asked to head an unofficial investigation into sightings which had occurred in America and Europe that year. When the alleged Roswell incident took place in early July 1947, he was the “go to guy” for answers.[1160] It is likely that he had knowledge of the “Foo Fighters” from his time on CIOS. His name certainly appears on something which has become known as “the McCoy memo”, although it is not a memo. In fact, the “memo” is a reply to a letter originally sent by Major-General C. P. Cabell and intended for the commander of Air Materiel Command (AMC). Dated 3rd November 1948, it instructs AMC’s Project *Sign* to increase its efforts to determine the origins of the flying discs.[1161] *Sign* (originally *Saucer*) had been established at the beginning of 1948 and was the USAF’s first serious official attempt to study UFOs. McCoy’s reply was actually an “indorsement”, a comment on a reply from Lt. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, commander of Air Materiel Command. In the reply, descriptions of the mysterious objects investigated under *Sign* fell into four distinct categories, one of which was *“balls of light with no apparent form attached”*. Referencing Dr. Irving Langmuir from the General Electric Company, this reply again mentions “balls of light”, which is a close approximation to what was being seen during WW2:

“In an early interview, Dr. Langmuir indicated that these incidents could be explained, but insufficient data were available at that time on which to base definite conclusions. It is planned to have another interview with Dr. Langmuir in the near future to review all the data now available, and it is hoped that he will be able to present some opinion as to the nature of many of the unidentified objects, particularly those described as “balls of light.”

However, the most important statement was yet to come:

“All information that has been made available to this Headquarters indicates that the discs, cigar shaped objects, and the “balls of light”

are not of domestic origin."[1162]

On 10th December 1948, US Air Intelligence Report 100-203-79 was published. Awarded "Top Secret" status, the report was titled "An Analysis Of Flying Object Incidents in the U.S." and attempted to discern the truth about the existence and origin of the UFOs that had been sighted since the summer of the previous year. Looking at their origins, the report – or study – quickly laid its cards on the table:

"The origin of the devices is not ascertainable."

However, those responsible for the report did not let this stop them making guesses as to where "flying saucers" came from. Two options were provided, which may be familiar to those who read the UAP Task Force *Preliminary Assessment* in July 2021. The first was that UFOs might have been "domestic devices", i.e. some kind of American technology, secret or otherwise. The report suggested that the Northrop B-35 and YB-49 flying wings, or even the Chance-Vought XF5U-1 "Flying Flapjack" circular wing design may have been responsible for the objects described as "disks" or "cigar-shaped". The second option was that the saucers were foreign, and if so, they would be manufactured in the Soviet Union (since China at that time was in no position to build such devices after being ravaged by a long war against Japan and then civil war). It is interesting to learn which wartime German designs were actually considered as possible candidates:

"The Soviets possess information on a number of German flying-wing type aircraft such as the Gotha P.60A, Junkers EF 130 long-range, high-speed jet bomber and the Horten 229 twin-jet fighter, which particularly resembles some of the description of unidentified flying objects."

The report went onto describe the work that was believed to be underway inside the Soviet Union at that time:

“That the Soviets have a current interest in flying-wing type aircraft is suggested by their utilization of Dr. Guenther Bock who, at the end of World War II, was in charge of the flying-wing program in Germany. Achievements satisfactory to the USSR are indirectly indicated by the personal recognition he is reported to be receiving in the USSR. Recently it has been reported that the USSR is planning to build a fleet of 1,800 Horten flying-wing aircraft. Information of low evaluation has been received stating that a regiment of jet night-fighters, Model Horten XIII, is at Kuzmikha, an air base two miles south-west of Irkutsk. Kuzmikha is identified as one of a number of airfields for the protection of an atomic energy plant at Irkutsk. The Horten XIII as developed by Germany was a glider.”

As for the reasons why a Soviet-built and operated aircraft might be flying over south-western America, three possibilities were proposed. The first, and arguably most important, was *“to negate US confidence in the atom bomb as the most advanced and decisive weapon in warfare.”* The others were photographic reconnaissance missions, testing US air defences and conducting familiarisation flights over American territory.[1163] With hindsight, we know that the Russians did not develop a fleet of nearly 2,000 Horten flying-wing night-fighters based on the Gotha P.60 (a planned development of the Ho 229). After being sold several state-of-the-art Rolls-Royce Nene jet engines by the British Labour government in 1946, the Soviets quickly realised their potential and reverse-engineered their own copy, the Klimov RD-45. Given that the Russians had previously been using copies of the Junkers 004B and BMW 003, underpowered jet engines captured at the end of the war, the acquisition of Rolls-Royce Nenes was a huge coup. Once the RD-45 was installed in the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15, there was no impetus to develop untried technology. The MiG-15 finally provided the Russians with an aircraft that could meet Western jets on equal terms.

In any case, the report appeared to have a distinctly unsound premise, as the Horten H.XIII design was a single unpowered glider built in late 1944 to test the principles of supersonic flight. It was never intended to exceed 110 mph (180km/h) but was designed to gather data that could be used for future studies. The prototype first flew on 27th November 1944 and went on to conduct around twenty test flights before it was destroyed by liberated Russian prisoners of war in May 1945.[1164] The huge limitations of the design meant that it could never have been the foundation for a night-fighter design. The Gotha P.60C night-fighter project would have been a better candidate. As for the Junkers EF.130, it was a jet bomber design proposed in early 1945. A large flying wing aircraft powered by four HeS 011A jet engines mounted above an all-metal central section, the project failed to attract official approval and was not proceeded with.[1165]

The Horten Ho 229 and Gotha P.60 designs did bear striking similarities to drawings that were released of the object that Kenneth Arnold sighted over the Cascade Mountains in June 1947. However, only the Ho 229 V2 actually flew and could not have been responsible for “Foo Fighter” reports, nor were either of the designs developed by the Russians after the war, so could not account for the numerous “flying saucer” sightings.

Appendix “A” of Air Intelligence Report 100-203-79 also had interesting comments to make. Although it was dealing with UFO reports in the United States in 1947 and 1948, the descriptions of the objects could easily have been taken from European WW2 reports. The following was found under the sub-heading *Some Aspects Regarding Flying Object Incidents*:

“A cursory examination of evidence on reported incidents has been made and it is possible to cite certain generalities which it appears may be borne out when detailed analyses have been completed. Among the incidents reported there are many statements by reliable and experienced persons which tend to confirm that flying objects have been seen. The description of such objects seems to fall

roughly into three categories: (1) Silver disks or balls, approximating a Horten wing type aircraft; (2) Balls of fire of various colors and intensities; (3) Cigar or pencil-shaped objects similar in appearance to V-2 type rockets in horizontal flight."[1166]

All of these descriptions were reported during WW2. Whilst it was odd that a Horten flying wing should be equated to a silver disc or ball, the torpedo-shaped objects witnessed by some crews were effectively "cigar-shaped". The report confirmed that the devices witnessed during the war were also being seen in the first years of the modern-day UFO phenomenon.

General John A. Samford, infamous for his July 1952 press conference devoted to the subject of UFOs, had been the Deputy Chief of Staff for the US Eighth Air Force in Britain during 1943 and after promotion to Brig.-Gen. the following year, took over as Chief of Staff. It is unlikely that he would have been oblivious to the reports of strange objects and "rockets" being made by the Eighth's crews over Germany. In October 1944 he was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff, A-2, Headquarters USAAF and therefore would have almost certainly heard about the sightings that aircrew based in the Pacific Theatre of Operations were recording. In January 1953, after recent reports of lights seen over Japan, the USAF Historical Division sent him a copy of a report dated 2nd May 1945 regarding strange lights that paced a Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber over the Pacific. [1167]

If the OSS had conducted an investigation back in 1944 or 1945, then it is possible that knowledge of the "Foo Fighters" and any conclusions that may have been reached, might have filtered into the fledgling CIA. In 1952, the latter set up a review into Project *Blue Book*, which was established by the USAF in March of that year to investigate the increasing numbers sightings of UFOs. In terms of UFO investigations by the USAF, *Blue Book* was the successor to Project *Grudge*, itself preceded by Project *Sign*. Neither of these earlier efforts had managed to determine the nature of the mysterious objects being reported. *Sign* ran for most of 1948 but failed to answer the question of the "flying saucers" as there was not

enough data to determine their origin. At first, programme staff believed that the UFOs were of Soviet origin. *Grudge* followed quickly after *Sign's* demise, with a new remit using standard intelligence procedures to investigate cases. However, reports of "sloppy debunking" and closed-minded attitudes to the issue spelt the end of the project in late 1951. Project *Blue Book* was initially led by Captain Edward J. Ruppelt, a former USAAF bombardier in WW2 and then a member of the Air Technical Intelligence Center based at Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio, where he analysed reports of Soviet-built jets operating in support of the North Koreans during the Korean War.

In December 1952, the CIA provided the Intelligence Advisory Committee with a recommendation that a scientific panel should be set up to review recent cases of UFOs in an attempt to progress matters further. These included reports of unknown objects over the nation's capital over two separate weekends in July of that year. The CIA recommendation resulted in the establishment of the Robertson Panel, under Howard P. Robertson, who it may be remembered was an advisor to General Spaatz at USSTAF and also a member of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) plus the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC). He had a later role as Chief of the Scientific Intelligence Advisory Section within Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) in Europe. Robertson had also been consulted about the "silver discs" that had been seen over Stuttgart in September 1943 and had been contacted in early February 1945 to consider the "Foo Fighters".

The Robertson Panel met in January 1953 to look at the available data and try and reach a conclusion. Their report was 28 pages long and buried away on Page 11 was a section titled *"On Lack Of Danger".* It referred to the "Foo Fighters":

"The Panel concluded unanimously that there was no evidence of a direct threat to national security in the objects sighted. Instances of 'foo fighters' were cited. These were unexplained phenomena sighted by aircraft pilots during World War II in both European and Far East theaters of operation wherein 'balls of light' would fly near

or with the aircraft and maneuver rapidly. They were believed to be electrostatic (similar to St. Elmo's Fire) or electro-magnetic phenomena or possibly light refractions from ice crystals in the air, but their exact cause or nature was never defined. Both Robertson and Alvarez had been concerned in the investigation of these phenomena, but David T. Griggs (Professor of Geophysics at the University of California at Los Angeles) is believed to have been the most knowledgeable person on this subject. If the term 'flying saucers' had been popular in 1943-1945, these objects would have been so labelled. It was interesting that in at least two case reviewed that the object sighted was categorized by [redacted] as probably 'foo fighters' to date unexplained but not dangerous; they were not happy thus to dismiss the sightings by calling them names. It was their feeling that these phenomena are not beyond the domain of present knowledge of physical science, however."[1168]

In addition to Howard Robertson, Luis Alvarez was also a member of the Panel. His selection may have been due to knowledge of the wartime "Foo Fighters" phenomenon and his knowledge of radar. [1169] Griggs, the other WW2 radar specialist who had worked with Alvarez and Robertson in England during the conflict, was listed as the "most knowledgeable person on this subject." The biggest takeaway from the Panel's report in terms of the "Foo Fighters" was buried away in this section:

"If the term 'flying saucers' had been popular in 1943-1945, these objects would have been so labelled."

Another section of the report gives an insight into possibly just how hard it had been to investigate the "Foo Fighters". Although it deals with the flying saucer reports of the late 1940s and early 1950s, it could easily apply to any investigations of the wartime phenomenon:

"It was the opinion of Dr. Robertson that the 'saucer' problem had been found to be different in nature from the detection and

investigation of German V-1 and V-2 guided missiles prior to their operational use in World War II. In this 1943-1944 intelligence operation (CROSSBOW), there was excellent intelligence and by June 1944 there was material evidence of the existence of 'hardware' obtained from crashed vehicles in Sweden. This gave the investigating team a basis upon which to operate."[1170]

The panel suggested that the "will o' the wisp" nature of unexplained UFO sightings stemmed from a lack of physical material that they could get their hands on. The same would have been true of those charged with investigating the "Foo Fighter" reports in WW2. Robertson's observations about how the Allies had managed to discover the secrets of the V-1 flying bomb and V-2 rocket through getting their hands on actual hardware were just as relevant to any investigations into the "Foo Fighter" sightings. In May 1944, a V-2 landed in the River Bug in Poland after being test-fired from the Blizna range. It was discovered by a Polish underground group and retrieved before the Germans could find it. Engineers from Warsaw came to dismantle it and the pieces were flown to England for study. [1171] A second rocket launched from Peenemünde crashed in southern Sweden in June 1944 after exploding in mid-air. British intelligence officials travelled to Stockholm to examine the remaining parts, and these too ended up in England.[1172] As far as it is known, no "Foo Fighter" crashed or was captured for examination. There was nothing beyond the aircrew reports and, according to some post-war statements, possibly a few photos taken during some of the encounters. This was poor evidence for an intelligence service to work with. It is therefore not surprising that the "Foo Fighters" presented such an enigma.

The publication of Major Rudolf Lusar's *Die Deutschen Waffen und Geheimwaffen Des 2. Weltkrieges und Ihre Weiterentwickl* in early 1957 caused a minor stir in US Air Intelligence. Mentioned back in Chapter 10, Lusar's work included a section on alleged Nazi flying discs. Given that such devices may have fallen into Soviet hands and were possibly at the root of the UFO sightings sweeping

across America over the previous ten years, answers were demanded, and the German book was considered as a possible source of information. Even before it was translated into English two years later, Dr. Stephan Possony, a military strategist who was born in Austria, had been asked to read the book and review it.

In the meantime, Jimmy Doolittle, the chairman of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (the forerunner of NASA), but much more famous for leading the April 1942 low-level bombing raid on Tokyo, had also read Lusar's book. He ended up pouring cold water over it, claiming there was absolutely no truth in claims that the Germans had developed flying discs during the war:

"WASHINGTON (AP): James H. Doolittle says it "just ain't so" that Nazi Germany developed a flying saucer and a bomber that could attack the United States and return without refuelling.

The veteran airman, chairman of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, gave a House Appropriations subcommittee his estimates of reports published in Germany of great aviation accomplishments under Hitler. These were contained in a book by Rudolf Lusar, former German War Ministry special weapons chief.

Doolittle's testimony was published today, along with that of Hugh L. Dryden, director of the advisory committee.

Dryden said 'there is no truth' in a statement that German engineers designed a flying saucer which attained a height of 40,000 feet and speed of 1,250 miles an hour. Dryden said also the man supposed to have designed the bomber that could cross the Atlantic without refuelling had written a book of his own without mention of any such invention. Doolittle, asked about both the saucer and the bomber, said, 'It just ain't so.'"[1173]

The bomber referred to in the newspaper article was the Junkers Ju 390, the subject of rumours about a special flight to within 12 miles of New York in 1944 (see Chapter 16). Just over two weeks later, on 29th March 1957, a memo was sent by Robert E. O'Connor of the

Air Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC) to the Director of Intelligence. Entitled *(Unclassified) Review of Book by Rudolf Lusar*, it read as follows:

"1. Reference is made to conversations between Colonel W. O. Farrier and Dr S. T. Possony on the above subject (Unclassified).

2. This office basically concurs with your review of the book 'The German Weapons and Secret Weapons of World War II and their subsequent development' (Unclassified).

3. There is no evidence in AFOIN-4 files of German development of 'Flying Discs', nor is there any indication of Soviet development of such a vehicle. A check of available biographical files reveals no information on Miethe. The A. V. Roe engineering staff were contacted, and they have no knowledge of Miethe in their organisation."[1174]

ATIC had been formed in 1951 under the control of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence to assess Soviet scientific and technical capabilities. Assigned the official designation 1125th Field Activities Group, part of its role was examining various Russian-built MiG and Yak aircraft that were delivered to the West through pilot defections. As the technical element of the Air Staff's Directorate of Intelligence, it was known as AFOIN-4, so the search of files referred to in the memo related to ATIC's own information on possible post-war development of wartime German disc projects. ATIC also was the home of the Aerial Phenomena Group, otherwise known as Project *Grudge*, which soon became Project *Blue Book*, the USAF's official public-facing investigation into UFOs. ATIC assisted the small number of personnel assigned to *Blue Book* during investigations when required.[1175] It was therefore the ideal organisation to investigate whether or not any truth could be ascribed to the stories about wartime German flying disc projects.

Dr. Richard Miethe, the alleged Nazi flying disc designer, was rumoured to have moved to Canada after his Middle East adventures to work on the experimental VZ-9 Avrocar “flying saucer”. “Proof” of this move came in the form of a former SS technical department officer who had apparently asked the Canadian government for a large sum of money in exchange for both citizenship and information regarding a wartime flying disc project. [1176]

The ATIC memo found no trace of Miethe, or any evidence that he was working for A. V. Roe in Canada, and the last anyone heard of the alleged designer was in 1952 when he gave his interview about his supposed wartime work to the French newspaper *France-Soir*. His interview, together with Georg Klein’s and his inclusion in Lusar’s book are his only confirmed appearances anywhere. But what about the “Foo Fighters”? Had all of the investigations into those strange sightings simply ran their course?

Just what Howard Robertson and Luis Alvarez had discovered during their studies of the “Foo Fighter” reports during WW2 is unknown. As far as can be ascertained, little or nothing is known about their work in this respect. Mention of David Griggs in the Robertson Panel’s conclusion is interesting, however, as he did eventually talk about the “Foo Fighters”. In 1969, Dr. James E. McDonald, who had interviewed the Australian pilot Kit Williams in 1967 about his WW2 sighting, had two separate telephone conversations with Griggs, asking him about his personal involvement with wartime investigations. Unlike his 1967 interview with Williams, where an audio recording is available, all that exists of Dr. McDonald’s two calls is a page of hand-written notes. David Griggs was not too forthcoming although he did finally concede that no real conclusion was ever reached about the phenomenon. If Griggs had filed analysis reports in WW2, they are yet to be located. Should they ever been located, they would no doubt provide a wealth of information and analysis on the “Foo Fighters”.

“Foo Fighters” were also mentioned in the University of Colorado’s Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (the “Condon Report”), delivered to the USAF in November 1968 and

published in January 1969. In the section titled *Coronal Effects*, Martin Altschuler, a research assistant for the National Center for Atmospheric Research, stated the following:

"St. Elmo's Fire appears as a glowing luminescence hovering above a pointed object or near a wire conductor. It is usually oval or ball-shaped, between 10 and 40cm in diameter, and has a glowing blue-white appearance. Its lifetime exceeds that of ball lightning, sometimes lasting several minutes. The decay is silent but may be sudden or slow. Sometimes hissing or buzzing noises can be detected.

The primary difference between ball lightning and St. Elmo's Fire is that St. Elmo's Fire remains near a conductor. It has been observed to move along wires and aircraft surfaces, sometimes pulsating. Foo-fighters are probably a manifestation of St. Elmo's Fire."[1177]

Crews from the 415th NFS had taken issue with such suggestions from the armchair scientists back home in January 1945. Twenty-three years later, the scientists might have been more credible in terms of their professional credentials, but their conclusions seemed equally invalid. The air force witnesses specifically stated that they knew what St. Elmo's Fire looked like: they had seen it before. And yet, once again, someone who sounded as though they hadn't looked at the testimony from the time was effectively suggesting aircrew had just witnessed an atmospheric phenomenon. It is another reason why the Condon Report is regarded as being so flawed.

Those familiar with the history of UFO sightings and how they have been treated by the USAF and Pentagon will no doubt have come across the infamous 20th October 1969 "Bolender memo", obtained via FOIA by Robert Todd in 1979. Issued by Brig.-Gen. C. H. Bolender, Deputy Director of Development DCS/Research and Development, it recommended that Project *Blue Book* be terminated. He quoted from the Condon Report findings, which stated that

"nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge." Bolender took the flawed findings of Edward Condon's study and the findings of the 1953 Roberston Panel, citing them both as reasons to close Blue Book down:

"The conclusion which follows is that Project Blue Book does not merit future expenditures of resources. Accordingly, we recommend that it be terminated and that the actions which follow from this decision, such as cancelling Air Force Regulation 80-17 and not renewing the consultant contract, be initiated. (…) *Termination of Blue Book would leave no official federal office to receive reports of UFOs."*

Of course, termination of *Blue Book* and leaving "no federal office" did not mean the USAF were no longer interested in reports of UFOs, far from it. The Bolender memo went on to explain how Air Force personnel should continue to report sightings, and in what circumstances:

"Reports of unidentified flying objects which could affect national security are made in accordance with JANAP 146 or Air Force Manual 55-11 and are not part of the Blue Book system. (…) *However, as already stated, reports of UFOs which could affect national security would continue to be handled through the standard Air Force procedures designed for this purpose."*[1178]

Whilst the scale of Brig.-Gen. Bolender's involvement in post-war UFO investigations is uncertain beyond his recommendation to close *Blue Book*, he is definitely linked with the "Foo Fighters". As already mentioned, as a Major he was the commanding officer of the 414th Night-Fighter Squadron when it was based in Italy during WW2. He had personally chased after elusive contacts and his pilots had reported seeing "balls of fire" and other strange phenomenon, More importantly, he had access to all of the unit's mission reports, plus

intelligence summaries that included reports of “Foo Fighter” sightings from other squadrons operating over Europe. Bolender also saw what he described as a “reddish fire” in the sky over northern Italy in February 1945. Whether or not he actually believed in the stories that he was hearing, the then Major Carroll H. Bolender would have definitely been aware of the phenomenon, and when he presumably heard about a new rash of sightings began in the summer of 1947, his memories of the war and the ”Foo Fighter” reports would have almost certainly been recalled. Whatever the Brigadier-General’s involvement in UFO investigations, he had certainly been exposed to knowledge of sightings a few years earlier than the traditionally-held start of the modern-day phenomenon.

Despite all of the post-war enquiries that took place, the question of just what the “Foo Fighters” were remained unanswered by those who were in the best position to try and explain them at the time. There appears to have been little or no appetite to investigate further once the 1947 sightings kicked off. But can we still make an educated guess as to what they were, more than seventy-five years on from when the “Foo Fighter” phenomenon was first reported?

Conclusion:
What Were The “Foo Fighters”?

“Scarecrows have persisted and so have the trails of flame which follow our aircraft round the sky. The latter used to be ‘rockets’ and subsequently became jet-propelled fighters.”

> - January 1945 *Flak Report* confirming the evolution of the mystery objects from “lights” to “rockets” and finally to “jets”.

It is now over eighty years since the earliest of the events listed in this book took place. Most, if not all of the witnesses have sadly passed away and therefore cannot be contacted to confirm the events that are recorded within these pages. All we now have to go on are historical records, which were written and compiled at the time, and therefore are the nearest thing to having witness testimony. If only a handful of Allied pilots and crews had reported seeing strange phenomenon, this could have been attributed to combat fatigue, stress or misidentification of otherwise everyday objects. Instead, there are numerous witnesses and official reports, the latter which were compiled under wartime conditions when there was no time or desire for frivolity or superfluous paperwork, especially among front-line units where hard-pressed intelligence officers struggled to compile the “normal” reports of combat missions.

The only reason why details of the “Foo Fighters” and other phenomena were entered in war diaries and squadron records was that aircrew and intelligence staff alike believed they were some new form of German secret weapon, devices that conferred a huge advantage to the Nazis. The early RAF reports describe them as *Flak Phenomena*, which is what intelligence staff believed the stories of strange lights and “meteors” constituted. As the war went into 1943, yet no war-winning German weapon emerged, reports of strange lights and objects confounded both the specialists and

aircrews. Once the Americans started flying long-range daylight raids into Germany, bomber crews from the Eighth Air Force added more tales of strange flying objects to the mix. One thing was becoming abundantly clear: from the large number of different objects and lights reported by aircrew on daylight and night-time missions over Occupied Europe, there appeared to be no single phenomenon involved. Air Intelligence staff in the RAF and USAAF were totally bamboozled by accounts of “discs”, “torpedoes”, “swarms of bees” and “balls of fire”. It is not surprising that the intelligence officers at squadron level chose to question aircrew sanity and sobriety. However, in the early years of the war, it was easier for the intelligence staff to simply ridicule aircrew rather than try and understand what was happening.

It is interesting to learn that the names assigned to the phenomenon by aircrews changed over time, perhaps in the light of expected developments in German secret weapons research. In addition to appearing in squadron mission logs, the names also turn up in official analysis. In the case of the RAF, the phenomenon began life as simple “lights”, although they soon developed into “rockets” and finally as “jets”. The Americans had a variety of names for the daytime objects encountered over Germany, but “balls of fire” became a staple of official reporting. As for the night-fighter units, they soon settled on a single name for their own sightings – “Foo Fighters”.

Official analysis remained couched in terms of German secret weapons and would remain so until after the end of the war. As a concept, “flying saucers” had not even been thought of before June 1947 and were never considered as a possible explanation. Suggestions that secret groups were set up by the British or the Germans early in the war to investigate strange object reports have never been backed up with evidence, and in the case of *Sonder Büro 13*, it was exposed as a hoax. No-one has ever been able to track down the alleged British analysis group either, which leads me to conclude that the Massey Project never existed.

Fast forward to the autumn of 1944, and the invention of the term “Foo Fighter” gave American night-fighter crews a hook to hang their

reports on. One squadron intelligence officer had the foresight to start compiling a list of sightings, but there still did not appear to be any real urgency in terms of sending information up the chain of command. It was doubtful that many senior officers in the USAAF or RAF even knew there was an issue to deal with until much later on, if indeed they did so at all.

It soon transpired that the issue was beyond the capabilities of local USAAF Fighter Wing and Tactical Air Command headquarters. The matter had to be referred to higher authority, including the Air Ministry in London, which finally replied with a dismissive reply, one which suggested fairly mundane explanations. Although senior officials tended to downplay the fact that there was something strange going on, Allied aircrew continued to see “Foo Fighters” and other strange phenomenon right up until the final days of the war in Germany.

Although strange balls of light approaching RAF heavy bombers and USAAF night-fighters were certainly alarming for their crews who could not always be guaranteed a *Luftwaffe* aircraft was not going to open fire at any second on them, airmen eventually came to terms with the “Foo Fighters” as they did not appear to be hostile. This was certainly true of the 415th NFS crews, according to former 417th NFS radar mechanic and post-war unit historian, Richard Ziebart, who managed to interview some of the surviving crewmembers after the war and also gave his opinion on what was behind the “Foo-Fighters”:

“The pilots were very professional. They gave the report, they talked about the lights, but they didn’t speculate about them. (…) I think the Foo Fighters didn’t appear on the radar because they were full light. The radar had to have a solid object . If there were any bogeys out there, the pilots would have been absolutely capable of saying so.”[1179]

Hostilities in Europe officially came to an end on 8th May 1945 and the number of “Foo Fighter” reports suddenly plummeted to zero.

Sightings still occurred in the Pacific Theatre of Operations, but these fall outside the scope of this book. The lack of reports presumably reinforced the views of those intelligence officials, both American and British, who suspected that the ”Foo Fighters” were indeed German secret weapons. After all, once the war had ended, there were no Nazis around to be able to operate such devices. However, intensive searches of German aeronautical, engineering and assembly facilities turned up absolutely nothing that could be linked to the strange lights, Of the secret weapons projects that were examined, none were deemed capable of the types of manoeuvres or speeds witnessed by night-fighter pilots over the winter of 1944/45. Senior German military, engineering and scientific personnel were questioned after the war, but they did not know of such technology either. Despite the amount of anti-aircraft artillery located across Europe, there were no indications that any anomalous craft had been brought down, let alone examined by experts. If such things were shot out of the sky, files discussing these incidents have been either destroyed or were locked away in extremely secure facilities, never to be divulged to the public.

By the end of 1945, the former *Reich* had been almost turned upside-down by Allied and Russian investigative teams in their frantic searches for German scientific and technical personnel, secret weapons projects and research on a whole host of aeronautical subjects. Examples of *Luftwaffe* hardware had been carted off to Wright Field by the Americans, whilst the Russians established various technical centres to house “their” Germans. Although there was obviously a great deal of secrecy involved, especially on the Soviet side, if the Allies had discovered something to account for the “Foo Fighter” sightings, it would have been described in the official BIOS or CIOS files, if not in other intelligence caches. Remember that the Kenneth Arnold sighting and alleged Roswell crash were still a year and a half away in the future and no-one was considering aliens as the cause of the wartime reports. A German secret weapon would definitely not equate to extra-terrestrials, so no huge cover-up (as proposed by some ufologists) would have resulted if such a device had been located among the

ruins of the *Reich.* If the Nazis discovered alien hardware anywhere, then this has been successfully hidden for more than seventy-five years. Rather than a long-running conspiracy existing, it is more likely that this never happened.

Whilst actual hardware (alien or otherwise) may not have turned up, accounts of German flying discs did crop up from time to time in the early post-war years. Whilst on one level they are fascinating, in truth they were simply stories dreamt up by desperate people who wanted to escape the terrible living conditions in Germany in the immediate post-war years. Their tales of working on wartime projects ended up being sensationalised in various European newspapers but they never offered any real evidence to prove they had worked on such weapons. Once they realised that no-one was going to suddenly whisk them off to America and provide them with a house, car and well-paid job, these "designers" went quiet again and simply disappeared. Over the years, however, their stories have taken on a life of their own, becoming "proof" that the Germans did actually possess disc-shaped aircraft, and ones capable of fantastic performance figures. A CIA memo reporting a newspaper article turned into "evidence" that the organisation had investigated Nazi UFOs! These poor excuses for "proof" continue to be rolled out every so often, usually accompanied by phrases such as *"it is a well-known fact"* and *"it was known at the time".* I remember such tales popping up on the old Usenet rec.aviation.military newsgroup in the 1990s, back in the days of dial-up Internet connections. It was even clear back then that those advocating such fiction were unable to back up their claims, and eventually resorted to even more preposterous stories or, more often, attacking those who called them out on such rubbish. With the advent of the full-blown Internet and social media platforms, it is even more difficult to play "whack-a-mole" with those who peddle this nonsense.

If the Germans had somehow managed to build something along the lines of *Feuerball* or *Kugelblitz*, or a similar device, then absolutely all traces of it, including the personnel responsible for its conception, design, construction, testing, combat operation and also its complete destruction, somehow vanished into thin air. If personnel

had been captured before the end of the war, or rounded up afterwards, they must have been threatened, because they gave no information away about the existence of such a device, and apparently maintained such a stance until they died. In addition, those in charge of such programmes had managed to remove all of the documentation relating to their projects. All of this had seemingly been carried out to perfection amidst the chaotic final few months or weeks of the *Reich*. The same can be said for the flying discs.

Those who advocate the existence of secret German technology often fall back upon the myth that the Soviets managed to capture any examples of the weapons that existed in April or May 1945, as they overran sites in Germany and Czechoslovakia. There is absolutely no evidence that this was ever the case. A few CIA reports repeating articles printed in foreign newspapers and reports of individuals that presented themselves to FBI offices cannot be classed as proof of Soviet involvement. The Russians had not got their hands on examples of miraculous weaponry, flying discs or their associated personnel, as word would have eventually emerged following the fall of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, especially if there were people willing to pay for the information. It might have made for a tale in a newspaper article back in the 1950s, but it certainly was not factual. As for the Americans obtaining the same technology and developing it further, well, the same is true. If there is evidence of such events happening after the end of the war, it has yet to appear in the public domain.

With hindsight, it appears that researchers and writers in the 1950s and 1960s missed a golden opportunity to look into the known wartime cases back then in detail. Although a lack of modern communications would have made it difficult to trace many of the witnesses, they were somehow found in relation to contemporary cases, often via appeals printed in newspapers. The handful of cases published in the December 1945 edition of *American Legion* magazine would have been a start, as the 415th NFS was actually mentioned by name. Crewmen involved in other incidents did contact some of the UFO magazines in the 1950s and 1960s, although it seems that their accounts were never followed up. Did the wartime

cases not fit the overall narrative of the phenomenon starting in 1947, or were investigators just concerned with chasing up current sightings? Given the sheer number of incidents that were reported in those “golden years”, a lack of time, money and investigators may have been to blame for the lack of follow-up action. Whatever the reasons, it is a shame that wartime cases were neglected.

Based on the number on cases which have come to light, including those I discovered in the course of my own research and the available eye-witness testimony, it is clear that there was definitely something going on in the skies of Occupied Europe during WW2. As with contemporary reports, a number of cases may be attributed to mundane items but there still remains a significant percentage which defy description. Whilst someone wishing to “debunk” the “Foo Fighters” may suggest these items were just German *flak* rockets or other secret weapons, they should identify which type was involved, and also divulge their sources for this information. Suggesting that *Enzian*, *Rheintochter* or *Schmetterling* or one of the other projects were to blame for all of these sightings is patently ridiculous. None of the German missile projects ever reached the point where they could be fielded operationally, let alone deployed throughout Europe to account for the sightings reported across the continent. The various jet and rocket-propelled aircraft that did exist were not capable of such performance and manoeuvres in any case, and they had not yet been built earlier in the war when the initial reports were made by RAF aircrew.

The small number of accounts describing “hockey puck” sized objects and “pie plates” may well be some undiscovered *Luftwaffe* aerial weapon, an experimental device or unauthorised field modification that was trialled but did not enter widespread service. If so, it has escaped the attention of WW2 German aircraft enthusiasts over the last fifty years or so. Whilst I have covered these items in this book, they are an interesting curio but certainly not representative of the wider “Foo Fighter” phenomenon.

Some have suggested that there are no instances where Allied bomber gunners and fighter pilots opened fire at “Foo Fighters”, as if this occurred, they would have been instantly destroyed, as allegedly

occurred in several cases involving Cuban and Soviet Air Force MiG-21s during the Cold War. There are several cases where RAF airmen fired at strange lights, but the aircraft did not suffer due to these actions. In fact, there was no retaliatory action at all by the lights. I have no reason to doubt the witnesses, nor do I have any kind of explanation why there was no reaction to being fired at.

If pressed to suggest a possible reason, I would suggest the following: imagine being pestered by a small fly buzzing around your ear. Should it happen once or twice, you can no doubt live with the brief inconvenience. If it happens repeatedly, or more purposefully, then you are much more likely to swat the fly away, injuring or killing it if you are quick enough to hit it. If the strange lights were something unknown and had been flying in our skies for many years, WW2 may have been the first time when aircraft with the potential to fire on such objects were operating in enough numbers for combats to occur. It may well have been that the phenomenon decided to ride out the initial attacks, and only “return the compliment” much later, at least as far as the MiG-21 cases are concerned. I am not suggesting this theory represents the truth, but it could well be a possibility.

A couple of other points should be noted. There are very few reports of mysterious craft landing during WW2. Most, if not all of these particular sightings come from civilian witnesses. Nor are there credible accounts of crashes and retrievals by military forces, as the Rostov case from 1941 is very thin in terms of actual detail or names of witnesses. If there are any surviving craft, they may still be hidden away in extremely secret sites. The second point is this: if accounts of actual landings are few and far between, when we look at the number of cases involving occupants, there is only one case of note, Daniel Léger’s encounter with an “aviatrix” in northern Poland during the summer of 1943. It is left to the reader to draw their own conclusions as to why this may be the case.

Having looked at the subject of “Foo Fighters” in some depth, I believe I can state with a fairly high degree of confidence what they were not, given the numbers of cases, geographical spread and calibre of the witnesses:

Optical illusions.

Hallucinations.

Combat fatigue or stress.

Weather phenomenon, such as St. Elmo's Fire.

Allied or Axis aircraft, including *Luftwaffe* jet or rocket-propelled types.

Luftwaffe flak rockets, either actual, projected or hitherto unknown.

Feuerball or *Kugelblitz*.

German disc-shaped aircraft projects ("Nazi UFOs").

Given the numbers of witnesses from one single unit (the 415th NFS) over a short period of time, it is unlikely that they were all suffering from combat fatigue, mass hallucinations or seeing strange weather phenomenon. The above list also takes into account the histories of the *Luftwaffe's* jet and rocket-powered aircraft, *flak* rocket development and other secret weapons, both planned and realised. It dismisses flights of fancy such as the last two options, due to the complete lack of evidence and eye-witness accounts that could corroborate such claims.

This, then, begs the question of what the "Foo Fighters" were. Over the years, in addition to the above list, I have seen explanations along the lines of "earthlights" and other strange phenomenon which are still not yet fully understood. I do not claim to have any special knowledge regarding these options, so am unable to rule them out entirely. The same also applies to suggestions that extra-terrestrials may have visited Earth during WW2, "ultra-terrestrials" co-existing on our planet may have been responsible, or that these objects were inquisitive time-travellers from a far-flung future. It could be one, all or none of these choices. Whilst these are all intriguing possibilities, they are simply theories, none of which can be proven at present. I may sound as though I am ducking out of answering the question as to what the "Foo Fighters" were, but any thoughts I may have are simply based on opinions, and these are no more valid than the next person's. Knowledge does not confer expertise, it just provides more information, and in this case it still

does not provide the answer. If I were asked to pick one explanation, I would have to say *"I can't. I don't know."*

If questions were being asked back in 1945 about the true nature of the "Foo Fighters", then those responsible for such queries were seemingly content to let the matter slide once hostilities had ended. With Allied intelligence agencies stymied due to a lack of information, the subject of the mysterious lights was soon dropped, especially after the fall of Japan. During the following eighteen months, American air intelligence staff had time to catch their breath before the next batch of reports involving strange sightings occurred. After Kenneth Arnold reported seeing the nine strange objects over Washington State in June 1947, it was not long before a flood of reports started, and modern ufology was born. That tide of sightings has never really receded, yet up until late 2017, most people were no further forward in trying to work out what the strange objects and lights reported in our skies around the world on a regular basis represented.

All that changed in December 2017 with the bombshell release of three previously unknown US Navy videos, plus the news that former US Army counter-intelligence agent Luis ("Lue") Elizondo had been Director of the Pentagon's Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) between 2010 and 2012.[1180] He subsequently released details of the "Five Observables" that were believed to be associated with Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon (UAP).[1181] These were as follows:

1. Anti-gravity lift
2. Sudden and instantaneous acceleration
3. Hypersonic velocities without signatures
4. Low observability
5. Trans-medium travel

Although Lue Elizondo was referring to contemporary cases with his "Five Observables", it can be argued that two of these were demonstrated as far back as 1942. Looking at the incident that

involved the Polish crew in March of that year, the first two on Lue's list certainly apply. In later encounters, where night-fighter aircraft carried onboard Airborne Intercept radar sets, none of these systems managed to pick up the "Balls of Fire" or "Foo Fighters", even when they were in close proximity. The ground radar stations did not detect them either. This matches Lue's fourth "observable". I have not come across any reports that suggest trans-medium travel in the European Theatre of Operations, but that does not mean to say that such events did not take place. It is entirely possible that they did, and may even have been recorded, hidden away in records as yet uncovered. There is also the possibility of a sixth Observable, namely "Physiological Effects". One could also argue that the 1945 encounter involving the No.9 Sqdn Lancaster crew fell into this category.

In April 2021, I wrote an article for the science and technology news website *The Debrief* about how I felt public knowledge of the "Foo Fighters" was based on an incorrect assumption relating to when sightings began. I also drew parallels between a couple of wartime encounters and the one experienced by US Navy fighter pilots in 2004, citing the apparent inability of intelligence services, both then and now, to truly understand what was and still is going on in the skies around us. After speaking to Luis Elizondo on *The Big Phone Home*[1182] later that month, I reached out to ask him what he thought about these parallels, and his reply was as follows:

"As in modern accounts we can look back into history and apply the five observables to many other eye-witness cases where highly-trained professionals encountered what appear to be UAP. I believe as we apply Artificial Intelligence and machine learning to the problem, we will see more of a pattern emerge from the historical record."[1183]

There has been an absolutely seismic change in public, media and political attitudes to the UAP subject since 2017, driven by recent events and the work of numerous individuals, activists and increased

media coverage, This suggests that the patterns that Lue Elizondo refers to may emerge sooner rather than later. Evidence of this came when I was still writing this book at the end of June 2021, when the much-anticipated UAP Task Force Preliminary Assessment was finally submitted to the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. [1184] Whilst the majority of this preliminary report was classified and therefore not available to the public, the unclassified section contained references to the future use of Artificial Intelligence and machine learning algorithms. The report stated that these could be applied to case reports to potentially detect patterns and trends. Lue's comments were sent to me weeks before the report was due, yet those same phrases appeared in the report submitted to the Committee. Could investigative techniques such as those referred to by the former director of AATIP and the UAP Task Force submission be applied to older UFO case reports, including those involving "Foo Fighters" from WW2? Time and funding may be the judge of that question. I would like to see that research carried out.

There are many obstacles to overcome before even limited "disclosure" occurs. Whenever that day finally arrives, we may also find the answers to historical events such as Roswell, Socorro and the "Foo Fighters". Are all of these cases linked somehow? I would not like to bet against it.

Endnote

This is not an exhaustive list of encounters that occurred in European skies during WW2. It is hoped that readers who have access to crew logbooks, perhaps owned by friends or relatives, will take the opportunity to look through these for details of “Foo Fighter” type sightings and other strange phenomena. As far as Ufology is concerned, WW2 is possibly one of the most neglected periods of time since the start of the 20th Century. This book hopefully opens the door for readers to carry out their own research and investigations into “Foo Fighters”. Those of us interested in UFOs as a subject are a community, and the issue belongs to everyone in it, not just a select band of authors, commentators, experiencers and researchers.

My search for information on the subject of European “Foo Fighters” during WW2 does not end with the publication of this book. I intend to continue amassing information, possibly for a follow-on work or an updated edition at some unspecified time in the future. If anyone has access to crew logbooks that show details of encounters, no matter how brief or insignificant, I would love to hear from you. I am happy to receive feedback on the book, good, bad or indifferent. I am also considering researching a similar volume dealing with the Pacific in WW2 so would welcome the receipt of any original material for use in such a project.

If you have bought this book via Amazon, I would appreciate it if you could leave a review on their website. I am also happy to be reached at reivercountrybooks@gmail.com or @Borders750 on Twitter, and further examples of my writing on UAP subjects, including the “Foo Fighter” article published in *The Debrief*, can be found via linktr.ee/GraemeR.

About The Author

Graeme Rendall has been interested in aeroplanes since his he was four years old, when his mother bought him an Airfix model of a Spitfire “in order to keep him quiet”. Reading the histories of each aircraft included with the assembly instructions led to a life-long fascination with aviation.

Another early hobby was reading science fiction. He started acquiring books from his school book club, local library and as presents from his parents. Titles by Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov were early reads, the latter with wonderful artwork depicting futuristic spacecraft on their covers. This would lead to Graeme’s third long-standing interest, UFOs. When he was nine, his mother bought him a book which at first glance looked like an Asimov novel, as it had a disc-shaped craft on the cover. It happened to be Brinsley Le Poer Trench’s *Mysterious Visitors*. This blew his mind, and his quest for knowledge on UFOs has never ceased, although he couldn’t help but feel that the period from the mid-1990s to 2017 was “a bit lean”.

Graeme lives in rural Northumberland with his wife Jo, and when not writing, can usually be found walking on his local beach, in the Border Hills or staying on one of the Scottish islands, usually Gigha, Islay or Orkney. He has recently taken up writing on a full-time basis.

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[1] For an exhaustive account of the incident, readers may wish to obtain a copy of Kevin D. Randle's *Roswell in the 21st Century*, published in 2016.

[2] The term "flying saucer" was never mentioned by Arnold in his initial statement to the press. A reporter by the name of Bill Bequette is believed to have coined the phrase, although it is usually attributed to the pilot.

[3] **https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/us/politics/pentagon-program-ufo-harry-reid.html**

[4] **http://www.cagliostro.se/2011/05/02/the-ghost-fliers-2775134**

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[7] Frank Edwards, *Flying Saucers – Serious Business*, 1966, pg.11.

[8] Robert Chapman, *Unidentified Flying Objects*, 1969, pg.9.

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[10] Harold T. Wilkins, *Flying Saucers on the Moon*, 1954, Chapter 2: *The Coming of the Foo Fighters*.

[11] Ion Hobana & Julien Weverbergh, *UFOs From Behind The Iron Curtain*, 1972, pg.33.

[12] Ibid, pg.7.

[13] **https://www.bild.de/news/inland/nationalsozialismus/modellbausatz-von-revell-56042752.bild.htmll**

[14] **https://thedebrief.org/the-foo-fighters-todays-pilots-encounters-with-uap-are-nothing-new/**

[15] **https://twitter.com/ChristopherKMe4/status/1382721357683769345**

[16] Brian Johnson, *The Secret War*, 1978, pg.83.

[17] **http://pure-oai.bham.ac.uk/ws/files/28428696/RAF_Benz_Author_Final_Manuscript_PURE.pdf**

[18] *Flak* is a shortened version of the German compound word *Fliegerabwehrkanone* (anti-aircraft gun).It was adopted by the RAF early on in WW2 to describe both the weapons and the shells bursting in mid-air.

[19] An excellent description of the work done to defeat German bombing aids and radar systems can be found in two chapters of Brian Johnson's 1978 book *The Secret War*, or the BBC documentary series of the same name, available on DVD.

[20] **https://military.wikia.org/wiki/Schr ä ge_Musik**

[21] AIR 2/5070, *Phenomenon connected with enemy night defensive tactics: Bomber Command Reports*, The National Archives (UK).

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[23] Henry Durrant, *Le livre noir des soucoupes volantes*, 1970, pg.76.

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[25] John Hanson & Dawn Holloway, *Haunted Skies: The Encyclopaedia of British UFOs Vol.1*, 2010, pg.29-30.

[26] *Looking Back*, MUFON Journal No.290, March 1993, pg.18.

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[28] AIR 27/1660/32, Record of Events, No.301 Sqdn, January 1942, TNA.

[29] AIR 27/1660/36, Record of Events, No.301 Sqdn, March 1942, TNA.

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[35] AIR 27/577/46, Records of Events, No.61 Sqdn, November 1942, TNA.

[36] *Personal Report No.21 On Operations Night 28/29 Nov 1942*, AFHRA.

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[39] AIR 14/2076, TNA.

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[44] *Flying Saucer Review Vol.24 No.1*, June 1978.

[45] *Operational Research Section Report No.37*, March 1942, AFHRA.

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[47] *Operational Research Section Report No.45*, April 1942, AFHRA.

[48] *Operational Research Section Report No.51*, July 1942, AFHRA.

[49] *Operational Research Section Report No.53*, July 1942, AFHRA.

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[51] Ibid.

[52] An appendix to *Consolidated FLO Report No.196*, dated 9th January 1944, provides what details were known about the *Scheinsignalrakete* (although its actual designation was still unknown at that time).

[53] **https://www.nachtscheinanlage.de/exponate/scheinsignalrakete/**

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[56] *Operational Research Section Report No.61*, October 1942, AFHRA.

[57] *Operational Research Section Report No.66*, October 1942, AFHRA

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[128] John Ward, *Beware the Dog at War*, 1997, pg.300.
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[161] AIR 27/1658/15, Record of Events, No.300 Sqdn, May 1944, TNA.

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[165] Ibid.

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[169] AIR 27/1658/15, Record of Events, No.300 Sqdn, May 1944, TNA.

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[519] *Mission Report Form*, A-2 Section, 4th FG, 3rd October 1944, AFHRA.

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[546] **http://www.project1947.com/47cats/usnavydraft1.htm#1850**

[547] **https://www.ourcampaigns.com/CandidateDetail.html?CandidateID=17740**

[548] *Town Talk* (Louisiana), 20th April 1980.

[549] "Bogey" refers to unknown targets which may or may not be "friendly".

[550] Sortie Report, *OPREP No.190*, 416th NFS, AFHRA.

[551] 414th NFS War Diary, July 1944, AFHRA.

[552] ibid

[553] ibid

[554] ibid

[555] Daily Intelligence Summary, 63rd FW, 13th August 1944, AFHRA

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[559] **https://www.ww2.dk/oob/bestand/jagd/bijg400.html**

[560] **http://www.luft46.com/missile/x-4.html**

[561] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.124*, 10th October 1944, AFHRA.

[562] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.127*, 13th October 1944, AFHRA

[563] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.129*, 15th October 1944, AFHRA.

[564] Ibid.

[565] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.84.

[566] Ibid.

[567] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.136*., 22nd October 1944, AFHRA.

[568] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.77B*, 22nd October 1944, AFHRA.

[569] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.139*, 25th October 1944, AFHRA.

[570] 422nd NFS *OPREP No.84B*, 29th October 1944, AFHRA.

[571] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.84B*, 29th October 1944, AFHRA.

[572] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.85B*, 30th October 1944, AFHRA.

[573] The first part of the name was misspelt on purpose, as Schultz's flight jacket bore the same spelling. The serial number of the B-17 is unknown.

[574] 422nd NFS Daily Operations Report, 1st November 1944, AFHRA.

[575] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.87B*, 30th October 1944, AFHRA

[576] 422nd NFS War Diary, June 1944, AFHRA.

[577] This summary of events appears in the 415th NFS records that I obtained from AFHRA, but the title of the report is extremely faint and impossible to read properly. It is, however, a write-up of the unit's war history.

[578] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.89B*, 3rd November 1944, AFHRA.

[579] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.91B*, 5th November 1944, AFHRA.

[580] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.150*, 5th November 1944, AFHRA.

[581] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.151*, 6th November 1944, AFHRA.

[582] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.92B*, 6th November 1944, AFHRA.

[583] *The Day*, 7th November 1944.

[584] *Evening Tribune* (Albert Lea), Minnesota, 7th November 1944.

[585] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.94B*, 8th November 1944, AFHRA.

[586] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.98B*, 12th November 1944, AFHRA.

[587] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.99B*, 13th November 1944, AFHRA.

[588] Warren Thompson, *Osprey Combat Aircraft 8: P-61 Black Widow Units of World War 2*, 1998, pg.30.

[589] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.104B*, 18th November 1944, AFHRA.
[590] 414th NFS War Diary, November 1944, AFHRA.
[591] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.105B*, 19th November 1944, AFHRA.
[592] Ibid.
[593] R. V. Jones, Episode 3, *"Terror Weapons"*, *The Secret War* BBC TV documentary, 1977.
[594] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.163*, 18th November 1944, AFHRA.
[595] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.106B*, 20 November 1944, AFHRA.
[596] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.165*, 20th November 1944, AFHRA.
[597] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.167*, 22nd November 1944, AFHRA.
[598] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.172*, 27th November 1944, AFHRA.
[599] 422nd NFS *Operations Summary No.173*, 28th November 1944, AFHRA.
[600] *MUFON UFO Journal No.133*, January 1979, pg.3-4, but see also *MUFON Journal No.137*, July 1979, pg.13.
[601] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.112B*, 26th November 1944, AFHRA.
[602] Ibid.
[603] 415th NFS War Diary, November 1944, AFHRA.
[604] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.113B*, 27th November 1944, AFHRA.
[605] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.116*B, 30th November 1944, AFHRA.
[606] **http://www.warbirdsresourcegroup.org/LRG/luftwaffe_gotha_go145.html**
[607] **https://www.ww2.dk/air/attack/nsgr1.htm**
[608] **https://www.ww2.dk/air/attack/nsgr2.htm**
[609] *Flying Saucer Review* Vol.8 No.2, March-April 1962, pg.11-12.
[610] Garry Pape & Ronald Harrison, *Queen of the Midnight Skies*, 1992, pg.264-265.
[611] 414th NFS War Diary, December 1944, AFHRA.
[612] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.129B*, 13th December 1944, AFHRA.
[613] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.131B*, 15th December 1944, AFHRA.
[614] *New York Times*, 14th December 1944, pg.6, but also printed in numerous other American newspapers.
[615] 415th NFS War Diary, December 1944, AFHRA

[616] *The Washington Post*, 15th December 1944.

[617] *The Youngstown Vindicator*, 15th December 1944 – but again the story was carried by many more American provincial newspapers.

[618] 422nd NFS Operations Summary, 16th December 1944, AFHRA.

[619] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.131B*, 15th December 1944, AFHRA.

[620] Garry Pape & Ronald Harrison, *Queen of the Midnight Skies*, 199, pg.272.

[621] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.132B*, 16th December 1944, AFHRA.

[622] **https://web.archive.org/web/20090726103921/http://jeff.lindell.home.comcast.net/~jeff.lindell/The%20Sparticani.htm**

[623] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.133B*, 17th December 1944, AFHRA.

[624] 415th NFS War Diary, December 1944, AFHRA.

[625] 414th NFS War Diary, December 1944, AFHRA.

[626] *422nd NFS OPREP "A" No.134B*, 18th December 1944, AFHRA.

[627] *New York Times*, 20th December 1944.

[628] Nick Cook, *The Hunt For Zero Point*, 2002, pg.61 based on 415th NFS files.

[629] 415th NFS War Diary, December 1944, AFHRA.

[630] Jo Chamberlin, *"The Foo Fighter Mystery"*, *American Legion Magazine*, December 1945.

[631] Garry Pape & Ronald Harrison, *Queen of the Midnight Skies*, 1992, pg.258.

[632] 415th NFS War Diary, December 1944, AFHRA.

[633] **https://fantasticworlds.freeforums.net/thread/232/foo-fighters?page=5**

[634] Renato Vesco, *Intercept*, 1971, pg.82.

[635] Harold T. Wilkins, *Flying Saucers on the Attack*, 1954, pg.26.

[636] The 415th NFS War Diary does not list names for the event and the copy of the relevant daily operations report held by the AFHRA is too faint to read.

[637] **https://www.history.com/news/wwii-ufos-allied-airmen-orange-lights-foo-fighters**

[638] 422nd NFS Operations Summary, 25th December 1944, AFHRA.

[639] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.141B*, 25th December 1944, AFHRA.

[640] Robert Forsyth & Nick Beale, *Arado Ar 234 Bomber and Reconnaissance Units*, 2020, pg.47.

[641] *Honolulu Advertiser*, 23rd April 1950.

[642] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.142B*, 26 December 1944, AFHRA.

[643] 422nd NFS Operations Summary, 26th December 1944, AFHRA.

[644] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.142B*, 26th December 1944, AFHRA.

[645] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.104.

[646] Ibid, pg.106.

[647] Ibid, pg.106.

[648] 415th NFS War Diary, December 1944, AFHRA.

[649] ibid

[650] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.108-110.

[651] Ibid, pg.110-111.

[652] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.144B*, 28th December 1944, AFHRA.

[653] **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BqLB72wtgc**

[654] Roger Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth*, 1986, pg.294.

[655] An account of Jack Green's bombing missions can be found in Bert Stiles' *Serenade to the Big Bird*, 2014.

[656] **http://www.americanairmuseum.com/person/244891**

[657] Charles Bastien, *32 Co-Pilots*, 2004, pg.205.

[658] George R. Sesler, *Aerial Intelligence of the 8th Air Force*, 1996.

[659] Report from Group S-2 to Commanding Officer, 25th Bombardment Group (Reconnaissance), Subject: "S-2 Mission Report, Bluestocking 1/2", 1st January 1945.

[660] Clearly, some editors believed this headline needed spicing up even further. One provincial newspaper changed it to *"Eerie German 'Foo-Fighter' Stalks Yanks Over Naziland"*.

[661] *Herald-Tribune*, 2nd January 1945.

[662] *Chicago Tribune*, 2nd January 1945.

[663] *St Louis Post Dispatch*, 2nd January 1945.

[664] *Palestine Post*, 2nd January 1945.

[665] *Daily Telegraph*, 2nd January 1945. The story was credited to the Express News Service agency, and is reproduced in *Flying Saucer Review Vol.8 No.2*, March-April 1962, pg.14-15.

[666] Note sent from WDGBI to SHAEF, 2nd January 1945. A copy can be viewed at **http://www.project1947.com/fig/1945a.htm**.

[667] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.124.

[668] R. V. Jones, *Most Secret War*, 1978, pg.425 & 438.

[669] Memo by M.I.15 to FLO HQ No.5 Group, RAF dated 3rd January 1945, AFHRA.

[670] **http://spitfiresite.com/2010/08/battle-of-britain-1940-kenley-raid-parachute-cable.html**

[671] *Science News-Letter*, January 1945.

[672] *Time*, 15th January 1945.

[673] *Newsweek*, 15th January 1945.

[674] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.164B*, 17th January 1945, AFHRA.

[675] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.22D*, 30th January 1945, AFHRA.

[676] *Night Phenomenon*, memo from XII Tactical Air Command to First Tactical Air Force, 16th January 1945, AFHRA.

[677] *Request for Information Regarding Night Fighter Squadrons*, 19th January 1945, 422nd NFS files, AFHRA.

[678] Memo, Office of the Director of Intelligence, 21st February 1945, AFHRA.

[679] **https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/nazi-rocket-test-site**

[680] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.129.

[681] Memo to Assistant Chief of Staff, A-2, XII Tactical Air Command, from 415th Night-Fighter Squadron, 30th January 1945.

[682] Memo, HQ First Tactical Air Force to Chief Intelligence Officer, SHAEF, 5th February 1945.

[683] Memo sent from Air Staff, SHAEF to First Tactical Air Force, 11th February 1945, AFHRA.

[684] Memo sent by Air Staff, SHAEF to Chief Intelligence Officer, USSTAF, 11th February 1945, AFHRA.

[685] Telephone call from Harold Augspurger to Keith Chester and related in *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.135.

[686] Ibid, pg.140.

[687] Ibid, pg.133.

[688] Ibid.

[689] Nick Cook, *The Hunt for Zero Point*, 2001, pg.61.

[690] Operations & Intelligence Summary, 64th FW, 13/14th February 1945, AFHRA.

[691] Keith Chester, Strange Company, 2007, pg.136.

[692] 414th NFS War Diary, February 1945, AFHRA.

[693] Ibid.

[694] Ghostbombers website, *Kommando Sommer* operations for February 1945.

[695] 416th NFS War Diary, February 1945, AFHRA.

[696] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.136-137.

[697] Ibid, pg.137.

[698] 416th NFS War Diary, February 1945, AFHRA

[699] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.138-139.

[700] **https://www.saturdaynightuforia.com/html/articles/articlehtml/foofightersofworldwariipartthree.html**

[701] *Men Who See 'Em Say Foo-Fighters Can't Be Poohed*, Stars & Stripes (European edition), 19th February 1945.

[702] 414th NFS War Diary, February 1945, AFHRA.

[703] Ibid.

[704] Ibid.

[705] Operations & Intelligence Summary, 64th FW, 19/20th February 1945, AFHRA

[706] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007. pg.140.

[707] Ibid, pg.141.

[708] 414th NFS War Diary, February 1945, AFHRA.

[709] Ibid.

[710] Ibid.

[711] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.141-142.

[712] 414th NFS War Diary, February 1945, AFHRA.

[713] Ibid.

[714] The Me 328 "parasite fighter" did exist, although it was powered by Argus pulse jets as fitted to the V-1 flying bomb and was piloted. Performance figures were very poor, and less than ten examples were constructed. Plans to use it as a suicide weapon late in the war were also considered but quickly abandoned.

[715] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.145.

[716] Ibid.

[717] Ibid, pg.145-146.

[718] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.216B*, 10th March 1945, AFHRA.

[719] Memo, Air Ministry DDI2 to A/C of S, A-2, SHAEF, 13th March 1945, AFHRA.

[720] 414th NFS War Diary, March 1945, AFHRA.

[721] Operations & Intelligence Summary, 64th FW, 17/18th March 1945, AFHRA

[722] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.148.

[723] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.225B*, 19 March 1945, AFHRA.

[724] 422nd NFS Operations Summary, 19th March 1945, AFHRA

[725] Keith Chester, *Strange Company*, 2007, pg.148.

[726] 414th NFS War Diary, March 1945, AFHRA.

[727] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.226B*, 20th March 1945, AFHRA.

[728] Quote also appears in Charles McEwen, Jr, *422nd Night Fighter Squadron: A History*, 1983, pg.83.

[729] 422nd NFS War Diary, March 1945, AFHRA.

[730] 415th NFS War Diary, March 1945, AFHRA.

[731] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A", No.230B*, 23rd March 1945, AFHRA.

[732] Andreas Zapf, *The Jet Night Fighters*, 2019, pg.50.

[733] 414th NFS War Diary, March 1945, AFHRA.

[734] 422nd NFS *OPREP "A" No.234B*, 27th March 1945, AFHRA.

[735] Operations & Intelligence Summary, 64th FW, 1st/2nd April 1945, AFHRA.

[736] 416th NFS War Diary, April 1945, AFHRA.

[737] Operations & Intelligence Summary, 64th FW, 26/27th April 1945, AFHRA.

[738] Renato Vesco, *Intercept, But Don't Shoot: The True Story of the Flying Saucers*, 1971, pg.84. The original 415th NFS War Diary for May 1945 is unreadable due to the poor copy in the AFHRA archive, so this story cannot be verified.

[739] The letter was discovered among files obtained by Citizens Against UFO Secrecy in 1992.

[740] UFO-nachrichten Nr.183, November 1971, pg.4.

[741] Frank Joseph, *Military Encounters with Extra-terrestrials: the Real War of the Worlds*, 2018.

[742] Clare Mulley, *The Women Who Flew For Hitler*, 2017, pg.160.
[743] **https://www.acta.es/medios/articulos/ciencias_y_tecnologia/032041.pdf**
[744] Henry Durrant, *Le livre noir des soucoupes volantes*, 1970, pg.84
[745] Werner Girbig, *Jagdgeschwader 5, The Luftwaffe's JG5 'Eismeerjäger' in World War II,* 2012, pg.10.
[746] Ibid, pg.23.
[747] Ibid, pg.24.
[748] *Kriegstagebuch* (Daily Report)*, Luftflotte 5*, 21st April 1942.
[749] **https://www.raolsen.no/when-photography-turns-into-history/**
[750] Frank Joseph, *Military Encounters with Extra-terrestrials: the Real War of the Worlds*, 2018
[751] Werner Girbig, *Jagdgeschwader 5, The Luftwaffe's JG5 'Eismeerjäger' in World War II*, 2012, pg.53.
[752] Ibid, pg.224.
[753] Marcello Coppetti, *Arma segrata*, 1979, pg.67.
[754] *MUFON CES Bericht Nr.6*, 1978, pg.76-80
[755] Henry Durrant, *Le livre noir des soucoupes volantes*, 1970, pg.84
[756] Ibid, pg.85
[757] Memo, FBI Detroit Office to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, 7th November 1957, **www.theblackvault.com**.
[758] Letter to Robert Cutler, 4th November 1957, www.theblackvault.com.
[759] Report from Detroit Office to J. Edgar Hoover, **www.theblackvault.com**.
[760] **https://www.ufocasebook.com/Levelland.html**
[761] Karl Ries & Wolfgang Dierich, *Fliegerhorste und Einsatzhäfen der Luftwaffe*, 1996, pg.26.
[762] The first mention I can find of this case is contained in Larry Fawcett and Barry J. Greenwood's excellent 1984 book *Clear Intent*.
[763] **https://militaryanalysis.blogspot.com/2009/06/foo.html**
[764] Henry Durrant, *Le livre noir des soucoupes volantes*, 1970, pg.84
[765] Ibid, pg.86
[766] Ibid, pg.81.
[767] Marcello Coppetti, *Arma segrata*, 1979, pg.69.
[768] *MUFON CES Bericht Nr.6*, 1978, pg.94.

[769] *Ufologie Contact (Series Nouvelle) No.08*, July 1981, pg.30
[770] *UFO-Informations No.34*, 4th Quarter 1982, pg.5-7.
[771] *GEPO Informations (OVNI et compagnie) No.29*, 1st Quarter 1983.
[772] Ibid.
[773] Ibid.
[774] Ibid.
[775] Andy Roberts also reported on the saga in *Caveat Lector*, an article published in *UFO Brigantia No.28*, November/December 1987, pg.26-27.
[776] Henry Durrant, *Le livre noir des soucoupes volantes*, 1970, pg.86
[777] **http://www.ufo-db.com/WfrmSichtungAnzeigen.aspx?bol_Show=true**
[778] *Weltraumbote Nr.32/33*, July-August 1958, pg.14-15.
[779] *CENAP Report Nr.6, 1J/H6/76A*, August 1976.

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[782] *MUFON CES Bericht Nr.6*, 1978, pg.82.
[783] Michel Bougard, *La chronique des OVNI*, 1977, pg.419-420.
[784] Ibid, pg.419.
[785] *Bulletin des liaisons sahariennes*, December 1953 edition.

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[804] Jean Sider, *Ultra Top Secret: ces OVNIs qui font peur*, 1970, pg.370-386

[805] https://www.militaryfactory.com/aircraft/detail.asp?aircraft_id=213

[806] Jean Sider, *Ultra Top Secret: ces OVNIs qui font peur*, 1970, pg.378.

[807] Timothy Good, *Alien Base*, 1998, pg.17-18 & 26-29.

[808] https://www.battlefieldsww2.com/torpedowaffenplatz-hexengrund.html

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[837] **https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000015471.pdf**

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[841] J. R. Smith & Antony Kay, *German Aircraft of the Second World War*, 1972, pg.514.

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[1168] *Report of Scientific Advisory Panel on Unidentified Flying Objects convened by Office of Scientific Intelligence, CIA, January 14-18, 1953*, document dated 16th February 1953, pg.8-9.

[1169] Ibid, pg.2.

[1170] Ibid, pg.10.

[1171] Brian Johnson, *The Secret War*, 1978, pg.166-173.

[1172] Ibid, pg.167-169.

[1173] *New Britain Herald*, 14th March 1957.

[1174] *ATIC Memorandum T57-7999*, 29th March 1957.

[1175] **https://www.nicap.org/bluebook/51-69.htm**

[1176] For readers who are fond of a treat, the full convoluted story is laid out in Henry Stevens' *Hitler's Flying Saucers*, 2003, pg.205-208. In the author's opinion, the SS officer was simply another German who wanted a new life somewhere else, and who had concocted details of amazing technology in order to try and achieve this.

[1177] *Final Report of the Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects conducted by the University of Colorado under contract to the United States Air Force* (otherwise known as the "Condon Report", November 1968, pg.1173.

[1178] **https://www.scribd.com/document/484175944/Bolender-Draft**

[1179] *Air & Space Magazine*, August 2016.

[1180] **https://luiselizondo-official.com/**

[1181] **https://www.history.com/news/ufo-sightings-speed-appearance-movement**

[1182] **https://www.thebigphonehome.com/home-page1616514516205**

[1183] Note from Luis Elizondo to the author, 12th May 2021.

[1184] **https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Prelimary-Assessment-UAP-20210625.pdf**